

ugvmm

the uk.games.video.misc magazine



Here ends a three-year wait. ugvm issue 8, which has been coming 'real soon now' for longer than most of us have been alive, is finally here. And, just to ensure it ever saw the light of day, a new editor has taken the reigns: me!

Since the last issue, an entire new generation of systems has appeared. Sony and Microsoft have taken traditional gaming to all new levels of prettiness, whilst Nintendo, having dropped out of the race for horsepower, may have reinvented gaming with their one-handed motion-sensing approach to fun. Meanwhile, the launch of Windows Vista, even later than this magazine, has brought with it DirectX 10 and many new possibilities



to PC gaming.

The handheld market has had a shift too. Nintendo's DS and restyled DS Lite, armed with two screens and a stylus, have brought with them tons of new ideas and a new group of gamers. Sony's PSP has completely changed what people thought a handheld console could physically do, churning out near-PS2 quality graphics on a huge LCD screen in a device about six inches across.

We've never been so spoilt for choice as gamers, and with the likes of Halo 3, GTA IV and the sequel to the mighty Osu! Tatakae! Ouendan! out in 2007, it's looking like it could be a very nice year indeed.

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ugvm

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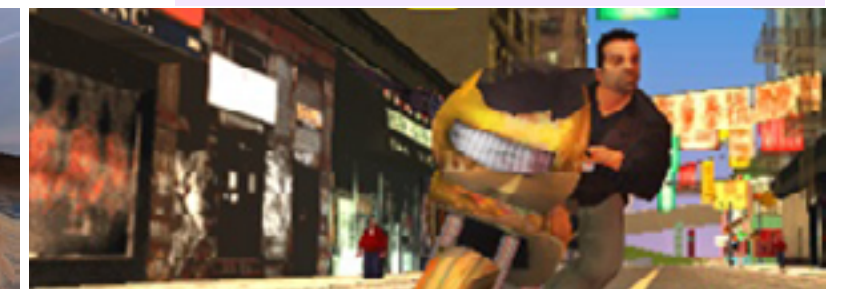
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Tim's Corner...

A week's a long time in politics, and two years is a long time in videogames.

It's been ages since the last issue of ugvm, we'll readily admit. Since then, there have been two major new handhelds released (and quite a few minor ones), a three new home consoles, a lot of "best game ever"s, and a lot of excitement over what's yet to come.

At the time of the last ugvm, who'd have believed us if we'd said that Nintendo's next console would be controlled by waving a wand in the air? Who'd have believed that the next game in the tired Resident Evil franchise would be one of the best games to ever be coded? Who'd have believed that a year later, the Phantom would still be "work in progress" and that HMV would have stocks of the Gizmondo?

We wouldn't have believed ourselves.

And that's the nature of the videogames industry. There's always some surprise around the corner, something wonderful, something disappointing. You could spend your time looking forward to the uncertain future, but we'd advise you instead to look at what's already here. Gamers have never had it so good.

a new era

The last three years have arguably seen more change in the gaming industry than at any other time in history. **Zomoniac** elaborates.

In the last 36 months, the handheld market has transformed completely, from old 2D SNES-a-like games and wannabe 3D games using the model 7 engine all from one manufacturer holding a monopoly on the market, to two machines both capable of creating full 3D worlds on the go.

Nintendo's DS and Sony's PSP were both unveiled at E3 2004, and have both received high critical acclaim and very strong sales. The DS is a unique little device, featuring two backlit screens, the bottom of which is touch-sensitive, opening up all kinds of fascinating possibilities, which have so far ranged from touchable rhythm action games to virtual dog simulators. It was built for new and interesting game experiences.

The PSP is a multimedia game-playing powerhouse. For the first time ever, games comparable in visual quality to the current crop of home console releases are now available for a portable device. Its

main criticism is that it lacks original titles, mainly consisting of ports with little or no change from their PS2 counterparts, but the fact that Sony's machine has so far seen versions of Pro Evolution Soccer, Ridge Racer, WipEout and Grand Theft Auto which at times are difficult to tell from the home console versions in still photos is a remarkable achievement. It also comes equipped with a memory stick slot, allowing the playback of audio, video and photo files on its huge screen.

In December of 2005, the new generation of home consoles officially started in the UK with the Xbox 360 launch. Now, after numerous delays, all three of the big players have arrived, with Sony rounding off the set with their appearance in March 2007 following Nintendo's appearance last December.

Microsoft and Sony have approached this generation of consoles in much the same way they did the last one: old fashioned games, but prettier and



better. With both machines able to play games in high definition, with the right equipment you can be sure your games will look pleasingly sharp.

Microsoft have placed their focus very much in the online arena with the revamped Xbox Live service, whilst Sony are focusing less on the games and more on the technology, using their own Cell and Blu-Ray devices to boost the potential of their machine.

Nintendo have gone down another route altogether with their Wii console. Putting fancy graphics and technology aside, the new control system aims to change gaming forever with an intuitive input method.

PC gamers may be in for a treat soon, with the release of Windows Vista and DirectX 10. Later this year the first wave of titles will appear, including the stunning looking Crysis (below) and Alan Wake. Whilst these games will require a hideously expensive PC to run properly, and no doubt much hassle and configuration to get working, they could prove to outdo anything previously seen.

It seems like an eternity since we were sitting waiting for the snippets of leaked information on the forthcoming consoles. Time has flown, and they've all been announced, most have been delayed, and they've all arrived across the world. Some have disappointed, some have amazed, but the variety is unquestionable. The line-up awaits...



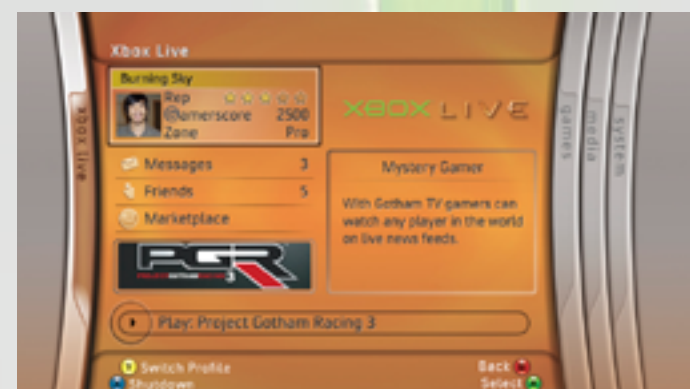
XBOX 360

"We're putting you at the centre of the experience. This is Xbox 360". Once you've managed to get over the embarrassing über-cool marketing slogans dreamed up by Mr. Allard and co. about the future being a customisable "Zen of gaming", it gives us a chance to have a decent play around with Microsoft's new beast in a box.

Physically the machine is fairly bulky, comparable in size to its predecessor, but the concaved design gives it a nice sleekness, far from the excessive bulk of the original Xbox. At 3.5kg it's a good 10% lighter as well, but certainly heavy in its own right.

Perhaps the biggest design innovation is the 'Ring of Light', a circle made up of four quadrants of green (or red – we'll get to that soon enough) light, one for each connected controller, around the power button, with the same ring in the middle of each controller. Each time a new wired or wireless controller is connected to the system, the next quadrant in the sequence will light up, and the corresponding quadrant on the controller will also illuminate to know at a glance which controller is which, particularly useful when playing with four wireless controllers.

Available in 2 (soon to be 3) separate configurations,

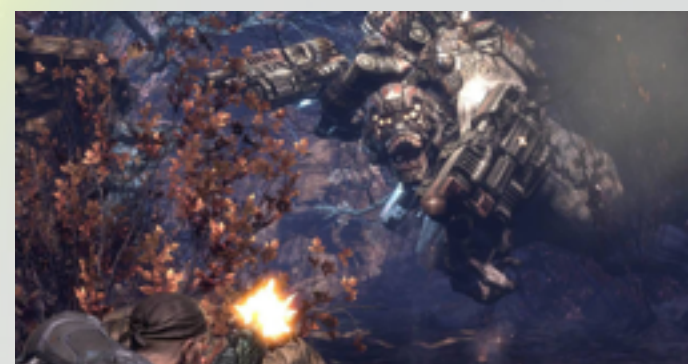


The new look Xbox 360 dashboard interface is lovely

Xbox 360 launched in late 2005, with an unheard of near-simultaneous launch across the three major territories, with Europe, North America and Japan all being able to buy their machines within two weeks of each other. The cheapest way to own an Xbox 360 is with the Core System, a cynical marketing ploy by Microsoft to advertise the console at a low price. Void of a hard drive, headset and HD cable and exchanging the wireless controller for a wired one, the Core System in many ways seems to miss the point of Xbox 360. The standard pack, or 'Premium System' as Microsoft have called it, comes with a 20GB detachable hard drive, a headset, a wireless controller, a component/composite hybrid cable (the 'Premium' is still the only console to include

a HD cable in the box) and a 1-month subscription to Xbox Live Gold. The Xbox 360 Elite, recently launched in America and expected here in 2007, replaces the white styling of the other systems with a black finish, upgrades the hard drive to 120GB and adds a HDMI port to the rear of the console.

It took a while to get going, with many criticising



Gears Of War is the new next-gen graphical benchmark

the console at launch for offering little more than HD PS2 ports, and a collection of EA Sports titles with the majority of their content pulled out. But starting with the releases of Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter and The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion in Spring 2006, Xbox 360 has managed to develop and keep a strong momentum, with titles like Fight Night Round 3, Crackdown, Gears Of War and Test Drive Unlimited continually raising the bar for which future titles must aim.

Arguably the strongest selling point of the original Xbox (Halo aside) was the Xbox Live online service, an online multiplayer service with a fee of around £40 a year. Live has been completely remade for Xbox 360, and in the process has become the defining part of the Xbox experience. A free Silver membership will allow you to register a Gamertag



Whilst it might sound like a trivial idea on paper, the Gamerscore has turned into one of Xbox 360's essential features. Simply put, each game has a set number (1000 for retail, 250 for XBLA) of gamerpoints to hand out for doing certain in game tasks. Utterly pointless, but painfully addictive watching that number go up and seeing how you fare against the best in the world (currently just over 150,000, with the average at around 3,700) and your friends. Usefully for Microsoft, the hook that achievement have on many players is enough to almost guarantee that cross-platform games will sell better on Xbox 360, such is the desire of gamers to add to their Gamerscore.



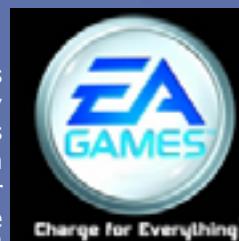
(your online alias), and starting acquiring a Gamerscore (see 'Achievement Unlocked'). You will also get access to the wealth of downloadable content, with almost 80 demos of retail games and 550 movies and trailers available for download, as well as have a friends list, send and receive text and voice messages, and use Xbox Live Arcade, a home for an ever-increasing list (currently around 60) of small downloadable games, each with a free trial and then a paid-for full game unlock costing between 400MSP (£3.40) and 1,200MSP (£10.20), which range from classic retro games like Smash TV and Doom to new titles like Geometry Wars Evolved and Marble Blast Ultra.

But to play online multiplayer you'll still need to shell out the £40. However few would argue that it isn't worth it, with a completely centralised system meaning unified friends list, fast connection speeds and games like Test Drive Unlimited with its MMO racing paradise and Crackdown with its free-roaming drop-in/drop-out co-operative mode offering great online console experiences.

Microsoft has possibly had the worst console launch in history for technical problems. The 3RLoD (3 Red Lights of Death, parodying Windows' infamous Blue Screen of Death) has plagued many 360 owners. Xbox 360 is heavily prone to technical failures, especially overheating, and when a critical fault

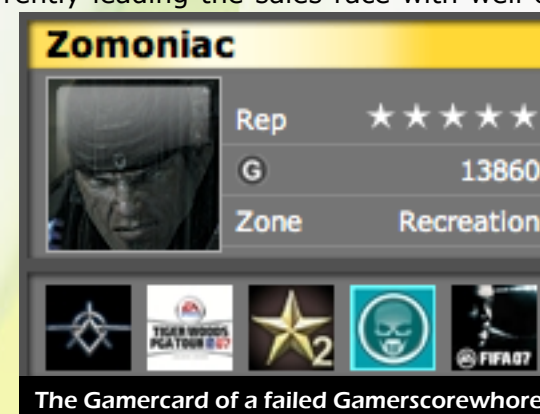
£1.70 for horse armour?

Microsoft have found themselves under fire from unhappy gamers on numerous occasions following releases of 'premium content', extra content for games downloadable for a fee from Xbox Live. Whilst a small minority has represented value for money, most has seemed extravagant, with 200MSP for Oblivion horse armour, 500MSP for three Guitar Hero 2 tracks and over 2,000MSP for the complete Lumines Live! game with all the packs (required to unlock many modes) being among the worst received (100MSP = approx £0.85). EA, meanwhile, has been flooding the marketplace with around 4,000 gamer pictures and themes appearing for every sports game it releases, as well as allowing people to pay for cheats, allowing impatient gamers to pay to max out their Tiger Woods character stats and use their perfect character in online game modes, destroying online competition from the outset.



occurs three of the Ring of Light's quadrants glow red. It has been a serious problem for Microsoft, having to send out numerous replacement systems, with some people having had three, four or more consoles since launch. Things are said to be improving, with later batches proving far more reliable, but word that Microsoft are charging £85 or more for repairs to systems more than a year old has left a bitter taste in the mouth of a few people. In the US, where statutory rights only insist on a 3 month manufacturers guarantee, Microsoft extended their free repair or replacement timeframe from 3 months to 12 for units built in December 2005 and January 2006.

Currently leading the sales race with well over 10



The Gamercard of a failed Gamerscorewhore

million units shifted (although it does have almost a year's advantage), things look promising for Xbox 360. A packed release schedule for 2007, including flagship system-shifter Halo 3 and the unstoppable blockbuster Grand Theft Auto 4, will surely keep that going. All that's left now is for Microsoft to sort out some of the teething issues that have been causing so much frustration to gamers and they should fare very well indeed (in the west, at least).

PLAYSTATION 3

It's the best part of a year late and requires a remortgage on your house to afford, but Sony's latest addition to the seemingly unstoppable PlayStation brand has landed on European shores, to a mostly unreceptive audience who feel cheated by the endless delays and paying premium prices for a lesser console (see What did we do?).

Announced in E3 2005, PlayStation 3 promised revolutionary power beyond our wildest dreams. Up there with the latest supercomputers, the all-new Cell-powered PlayStation 3 boasted power pushing 2 teraflops, dual 1080p outputs and 3 Gigabit Ethernet ports capable of delivering a completely new experience in gaming and home entertainment. It was to be released Spring 2006 alongside an array of exclusive games that, because of the raw power of the console's Cell CPU, RSX GPU and Blu-Ray storage drive, no other machine could handle. The world stood up and took notice.

Then slowly, over 18 months, everything changed. The two HDMI outputs and three ethernet ports became one of each. The announcement of the price caused many to question the real need for the Blu-Ray drive, with concern amongst gamers that it was put in merely to guarantee the success of Sony's new medium in its race against the competing HD-DVD format.



Motorstorm is pretty, but looks nothing like the trailer...

Not all is bad though. Sony's online gaming service comes free for all, with several promising new additions to it on the way, such as the PlayStation Home service, a world where you can personalise with your own 3D avatar and wonder around your customisable home with a trophy cabinet to show off completed games to other gamers, who can also mingle around your little world, as you can theirs, in what looks to be an intriguing mix of Nintendo's Mii system and the popular Second Life 'game'.

Sony have also opted for Microsoft's approach of not having hardware-based region-locking for

games, instead giving publishers the choice of encoding it onto the disc, but is currently one step ahead, with not a single game to date (even the EA ones) having any kind of regional restrictions.



Little men on giant skateboards. That'll make them sell...

With a number of exclusives on the way, including the strangely charming Little Big Planet, alongside Metal Gear Solid 4 (although rumours that this is on its way to Xbox 360 remain strong), Heavenly Sword, Final Fantasy XIII, Gran Turismo 5 and the inevitable God Of War 3, along with rumours of an impending price drop after nothing short of a complete disaster at retail, there is still time for Sony to turn its fortunes around and allow PS3 to reach its full potential. But it will take some doing, with a large number of publishers seemingly fleeing the sinking ship. Already the number of former exclusives on their way to 360 is staggering, including, but by no means exclusive to, Assassin's Creed, Devil May Cry 4 and the holy grail of gaming licenses, Grand Theft Auto IV.

Physically, the machine has divided opinion. It is similar in size, marginally larger, than Xbox 360. However the convex design of the unit makes it appear enormous upon first glance when compared to the 360's concaved sleekness. In contrast to 360



Stanford University has for many years allowed people to participate in its Folding@home, an initiative started in 2000 by the university's associate professor of chemistry, Vijay Pande. The system uses the CPU of an idle computer to simulate the folding of protein, and then sending back the results, allowing millions around the world to help speed up the search for cures of many diseases, including Parkinson's and Alzheimer's. Now gamers can get in on the action, with PS3 allowing users to participate. Simply sign up, and when your PS3's on and you're not using it, Stanford University will call upon your Cell processor to do some serious folding. At last, a console with the genuine potential to cure cancer.



though, the PS3's power supply is internal, which will come as a substantial relief to anyone who's spent excessive time trying to find somewhere to place their 360's behemoth of a power brick without just dumping it in the mess of cables behind the TV and causing a long series of overheating problems.

Finished in a black ultra-high-gloss coat not dissimilar to that of PSP, PS3 can either look like a very oversized toy, or a very futuristic, state-of-the-art piece of electronics, depending on the angle you catch. Its shiny exterior, however, seems able to call every dust particle within a three mile radius to wrap itself in, and even thinking about trying to clean it will result in an endless forest of fingerprints.

The controller will be familiar to anyone who has played on a PS2, in its shape at least. The new pad, dubbed SIXAXIS by Sony's palindrome department, at first appears like a Dual Shock 2 but without a cable. Using Bluetooth technology, up to seven of these controllers can connect at once, but they will at first need connecting with a cable to bind them to the machine. It's also very light, in no small part due to the lack of rumble motors. Sony claim their absence is entirely due to technological limitations in that they would interfere with the motion sensors. It definitely doesn't have anything to do with the substantial sum of money Sony were forced to pay Immersion Technologies for

What did we do?

With Xbox 360 arriving in Europe 10 days after the American launch, and Wii crossing the Atlantic in well under a month, you'd be forgiven for thinking that people had finally started to understand the importance of Europe as a major player in the games market. Not so. PlayStation 3 in Europe over 4 months later than the US and Japan. That's over a third of a year. That's as long as it takes to make a new FIFA game. But just to rub salt in the wound, in order to allow Sony to sell them elsewhere cheaper, we'd be covering their losses, with a UK RRP of £425, compared to an American RRP of around £299 and a measly £249 in Japan. And, as if it couldn't get any worse, just weeks before UK launch the announcement was made that the chip in PS3 that ran PS2 games in hardware would be replaced by software emulation for the European models. This meant the backwards compatibility rate dropped from 99% to less than 10%, and in effect means we get to pay twice as much for a crippled machine.



stealing their technology for use in the Dual Shock 2 controller, apparently.

But the twist (oh dear) is that SIXAXIS has motion sensing of sorts, across six axes (do you see?). Whilst not as sophisticated as the mechanisms seen in Nintendo's Wii controllers, the idea is that for many games, particularly racing and flying games, movement can be controlled in a 3D space, rather than merely with thumb control.

It's been a rocky first few months for Sony. Even with stores currently offering the machine at £25 below RRP, and throwing in a Blu-Ray film and a HDMI cable (PS3 has no high-definition leads in the box), they're still clogging up stores nationwide. But most early adopters seem happy, if a little short-changed, so not all is bad. With potential in the forthcoming release schedule, a possible price-drop looming, Blu-Ray's line-up getting stronger by the minute and promising new online features, there is still time for Sony to unleash the power of their beast, but it will be an uphill struggle to win back the hearts of so many betrayed Europeans.



It's sort of like a PSP, only bigger. And £425.

wii™

A long, long time ago, I can still remember. It was way back in summer 2004 when Nintendo mentioned they had a new console in the works. Codenamed 'Revolution', it promised new things, new ways of playing games, without the need for a conventional controller. A few years down the line, following the unveiling of the controller in September 2005 (unveiled late to avoid being plagiarised – not that it stopped Sony) and a controversial name change in 2006, Wii is here.

Very small and very pretty, Wii is only available in a high-gloss white finish (or iPod White as it is sometimes known), and is not much larger than a standard PC CD drive. Like all of this generation of consoles, it can be used horizontally or vertically, but unlike the others it was clearly built with the vertical orientation in mind, as it comes with a stand in the box and those wanting to use a GameCube controller to make use of the backwards compatibility with all GameCube titles, which are loaded into the Wii's slot-loading disc drive as well as the standard 12cm discs that host Wii games, will find it difficult to do so when the console is laid flat.

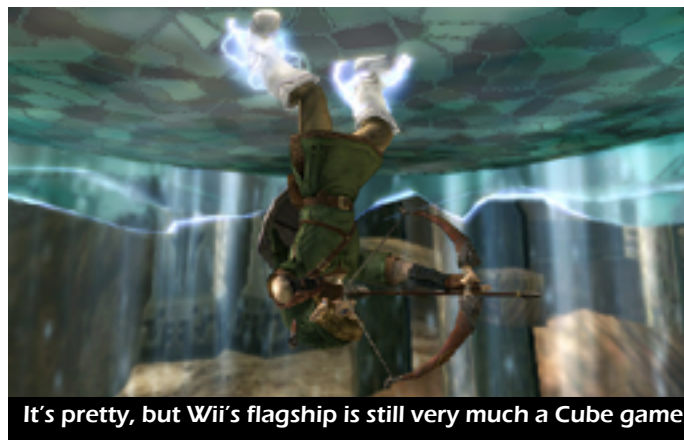
The controller, dubbed the Wii Remote by Nintendo and Wiimote by many users, is a small and shiny remote-control shaped device, with two main control buttons, a big round one on the top and a digital trigger underneath. Using a sensor bar with an infra-red light at each side, placed either on top of or underneath the TV, the remote uses an infra-red sensor to triangulate its position relative to the lights on the bar. Using this along with its internal



accelerometers, the remote can detect where it is in space, which way it's facing, what angle it's at and the speed and direction of its movement. It also sports a small, built-in speaker, so when playing, for example Wii Sports tennis, you will hear the 'racquet' strike the ball in your hand, and hear the return shot coming from the TV. It may sound like a gimmick, but it proves to be surprisingly immersive in practice.

For many games, you'll also need a nunchuck controller (included in the box). This connects to the remote via the socket at its base, and features an analogue stick and two buttons. This allows for movement in many games, for example a first-person shooter would have the player moving with the analogue stick on the nunchuck, and using the remote to aim and fire. It also has an accelerometer, allowing for two-handed motion-based games like the boxing part of bundled (in the west) Wii Sports.

When you boot up the Wii you'll be greeted with a grid-like menu system, navigated using the remote as a pointer. From here you can create a Mii, a personalised cartoon character-like avatar that will be your player in certain games like Wii Play and Wii Sports. You can send your Mii over the internet to your friends' consoles, and even upload it to a remote for easy transportation. Each grid square, called a 'Channel', can be moved around to wherever you please, and new Channels such as the latest world news and a web browser can be downloaded through the Wii Shopping Channel. There is also a message board feature, which tracks play time and allows you to message your friends.



It's pretty, but Wii's flagship is still very much a Cube game



reduction in game speed, destroying some faster games like Sonic The Hedgehog.

For the first few months of Wii's release, there was little in the way of new software, with only really Wario Ware: Smooth Moves of note appearing within the first two months. But this looks set to change, with the likes of Mario Strikers and the only good 3D Sonic game since 1998 having won critics over in recent months. Even Electronic Arts, famed for released carelessly broken games selling on name and license alone, have been taking Wii seriously, with the likes of Madden 07, Tiger Woods 07, SSX: Blur and the Godfather all making it to Wii with a well thought out and suitable gesture-based control mechanism. Wii has sold phenomenally well, with over 7 million units sold in its first six months and supplies still very limited. It is expected that demand will exceed supply for a long time to come.

The Wii Shopping Channel also plays host to the new Virtual Console system, which allows Wii users to purchase and download retro games, including N64, SNES, Mega Drive, TurboGrafx and NES titles, to the system's 512MB of flash storage. These games can be played either with a GameCube controller, a Wii Classic controller (sold separately, this strange hybrid of SNES and GameCube controllers connects to the bottom of the remote like the nunchuck) or, in the case of NES and some Mega Drive games, holding the remote on its side to use the d-pad and 1 and 2 buttons found at opposite ends of the unit. Whilst some have expressed displeasure with the pricing of these games and the slow rate of release, the primary concern for us Brits is the lack of 60Hz functionality in many games. Despite almost all televisions (particularly those featuring a composite, SCART or component socket required to run a Wii) now supporting 60Hz/NTSC, the European releases often come with big borders at the top and bottom of the screen and a substantial

Despite its limitations and frustrations (very few games support Wii's online system, and a cumbersome interface means exchanging 16-digit friend codes with everyone you know in order to add them to your Wii friends list, with a 12-digit code then required for online play, although whether this code will be specific to a Mii or a game is not yet clear), Wii shows a huge amount of promise. Wii Sports alone is enough to suggest it has real potential to do great things. Whilst support so far has been slow to really show what it can do, with several inferior ports of PS2 games with broken controls shoehorned in (THQ and Ubisoft being the principle offenders) waiting to greet it at launch, there is still much time for this to change. With the likes of Super Mario Galaxy, Metroid Prime: Corruption and an online Super Smash Bros to look forward to, Wii may well turn out to be the biggest surprise in gaming history.



A novelty it may well be, but with Wii Sports, Nintendo may have made the best party game ever.

NINTENDO DS™

The DS is the 'third pillar' in Nintendo's plans, alongside the Game Boy line and the home console range. In reality, it's pretty much removed the need for the Game Boy line, largely due to having backwards (or sideways, if you believe Nintendo) compatibility with Game Boy Advance titles, using the second slot in the bottom of the console, and allowing you to play all your old titles on your choice of the DS's two backlit screens.

The two screens are backlit and a huge improvement over the washed out side-lit screen of the GBA SP, and the touch-screen is largely very responsive and accurate. The original unit itself is fairly big and cumbersome, but light enough to not be hugely uncomfy when holding with one hand and using the other for stylus control. However, the DS Lite is smaller and more comfy, particularly when held in the traditional style with both hands - this method of play can be cramped on the original unit.

Power wise, so far what we've seen is graphically equivalent to slightly sharper N64 graphics, so full 3D worlds but nothing to write home about. The sound is good and the built in stereo speakers are surprisingly pleasant a surprisingly effective surround effect. Finally, it's cart-based, so no load times and no need for a memory card.

The games so far have been a mixed bag, ranging from the simply ingenious to the nasty and lazy ports. New games like Nintendogs, Osu! Tatakae! Ouendan! and Project Rub have made the most of the unique features of the DS, with techniques like stroking a dog with a stylus and blowing a raft across the water, resulting in great original gameplay experiences. At the opposite end of the spectrum are the broken games that don't use any of the machine's capabilities, games like Burnout Legends and GoldenEye: Rogue Agent which do nothing but tarnish the good name of Nintendo DS.

Whilst Nintendo at first said the DS wasn't in competition with Sony's PSP, recent sales have, unsurprisingly, been causing them to compare the two. With sales figures approximately double (overall sold to date) that of its more powerful rival, DS is proving the more popular choice across the world. This is in no small part down to the 'Touch Generations!' games range, featuring non-gamer oriented games to try and encourage new people to join the fun. Nintendogs has been a phenomenal success, having three different versions of the same game in the UK all-formats top 10 chart at one point. A remarkable achievement.

Alongside Nintendogs, the other major blockbuster has been Dr. Kawashima's Brain Training, a game that will only allow you to play its main mode for about twenty minutes a day, and asks you to do various brain-stimulating challenges like rapid-fire arithmetic, memory challenges and reading games, before giving you an estimation of your brain age. The better you perform, the lower your age, so you can do these exercises to try and improve brain functionality and response, thus lowering your age.

One of the few complaints targetted at DS was the physical design of the unit. Big and flimsy with very dim screens, DS was not an appealing bit of gear, especially when stood next to the sleek and insanely bright PSP. A little after a year after launch Nintendo launched the DS Lite. The same machine innards as the standard DS, the Lite was smaller, sexier and sturdier (although there has been an



issue with hinges cracking on the white unit) than its predecessor.

The main improvement, however, aside from the GBA slot cap and improved stylus, came from the screens. The new screens are a joy to behold, and are capable of reaching insane levels of brightness, equal to if not superior to the PSP's. There are four selectable levels of brightness to choose from, and the difference it makes when held side-by-side with the first unit is remarkable.

When on full brightness the only problem comes from the significant drain on battery life. Whilst DS has gained a reputation for having a great battery life (the original unit managed about 15 hours compared to the 3 or 4 a PSP could manage), upping the brightness can slash the battery life in half. Using the wireless connection as well will damage it further still, and a fully lit game of Animal Crossing online can run a full charge dry in under five hours.

Like all Nintendo consoles, getting decent games in a decent timeframe on DS is high on impossible, with most serious gamers choosing to import, getting the same game earlier and cheaper. Many of the UK chart high spots are taken by games over a year old, with the likes of Elite Beat Agents and Metroid Prime Pinball still not available in the UK. Because of this, it can often appear the machine is slowing down and tailing off. Whilst this has improved recently with the likes of Phoenix Wright: Justice For All and Lost In Blue 2 making appearances, some people may wonder why the likes of Brain Training, Nintendogs and New Super Mario Bros are still the first games they see in store.

Nintendo said that they wanted to change gaming with DS. They've made a great machine with some truly brilliant original games, with more on the way like Zelda: Phantom Hourglass and Osu! Tatakae! Ouendan! 2. Whether or not they've changed gaming is debatable, but what is certain is that they've introduced a whole new audience to gaming and effectively destroyed the competition in



the process. DS isn't about hip marketing speak or flashy parties or celebrity endorsements. It's about games, and games are where it excels. There's a reason Nintendo have monopolised the handheld market for so long, brushing aside Sega, Atari and probably Sony in the near future. When they are giving gamers this much fun, it's hard to begrudge them this success. We are the touch generation. Touch me.



Nintendogs had three versions in the UK top 10...



Mario Kart DS: Handheld online gaming joy.



The first thing one notices about the PSP is the way it looks. It can't be denied, even by the most fanatical Sony haters, this is truly a thing of beauty. Sleek, shiny, and with an enormous, stunning clear TFT screen, this represents a new phase of gaming, one where style matters.

The PSP reaches out to a new gaming audience, the gadget freak, and seems to have quickly secured itself as the most desirable thing since the iPod.

Once you've got past the looks, there's the small matter of the games and features. Sony are selling it as a wonderful convergence device. It plays mp3s (well), it plays videos (well if you can be bothered to go through the hassle of converting them to the machine's requirements), and it displays photos, (about as well as could be expected). The games are mostly PS2 ports, which is fine if you want that kind of thing, but there are a few great new ones too.

Power wise, this is the real deal. Pretty much PS2 quality graphics on the astonishing screen make for a spectacular experience, the first few times at least. It's big, and mostly comfy, save for the analogue slider thing - this is meant to replace the analogue stick from the PS2 pad, but it slides on a flat plane rather than tilts, so you get no feeling of how far you've moved it, and as such it can be very awkward. Sony also put it in a very strange place, so extended play with it can lead to extremely painful hand cramps.

Those with an early model who haven't upgraded



Ridge Racer: Probably the prettiest handheld game ever made, at least at the time of writing.



Daxter gets his own game in this PSP masterpiece.

their firmware are also in for a treat. The homebrew experts have been working their magic once more, with a wide selection of emulators and other applications available for use on the machine. If you get bored of the next generation of handheld titles (or the last generation of console titles, depending on how you look at it), you can play perfect emulated versions of Mega Drive and SNES games, amongst others, even as far as classic LucasArts adventure games via a ScummVM port. A new official firmware update actually allows users to purchase selected PSOne games on their PS3 to play on their PSP, but prices are high and the selection is limited. That was never going to last long, and now the nice hackers have PSPs around the world playing PSOne games of their choice, ripped straight from the original CD.

Whilst Sony continues to try and combat this, they're facing an uphill struggle. New firmware updates, required for the latest games to run, continue to get released but are more or less instantly cracked. Up until recently there have been compromises in using homebrew, in that it required an outdated firmware that wouldn't allow many of the latest releases to play. However hacking maestro Dark_Alex quickly laid rest to that with his custom 3.10 OE-A firmware, which has all the functionality from Sony's latest release, coupled with everything that made the homebrew-friendly 1.50 so great.

Not all has been good on the publicity front, with Sony coming under fire on several occasions for its controversial marketing campaigns. In 2005 Sony hired a graffiti artist to spray paint PSP ads across seven cities in America. Sony claimed they were paying the owners of the buildings for the rights to



do so, but that didn't stop the mayor of Philadelphia filing a cease and desist order against them. In 2006, they ran a campaign with the tag "Take a running jump". A poster was carelessly placed next to a platform at Manchester Piccadilly, and swiftly removed due to fears that it would encourage suicide. Perhaps the most embarrassing, however, was Sony's blog, www.alliwantforxmasisapsp.com, supposedly following the desperate desires of two boys to convince their parents to buy them PSPs for Christmas. After much sniffing around, people discovered the site was in fact registered by youth marketing company Zipatoni on behalf of Sony, and that the blog's 'writers' were entirely fictitious.

Perhaps the worst publicity of all though, certainly amongst the hardcore gaming crowd, came through their never-ending dispute with Hong Kong retailer Lik-Sang. Lik-Sang had for many years sold gaming hardware and software, along with many gaming novelties and merchandise, across the world, and with a 9 month gap (that's the time it takes to make a FIFA trilogy) between the Japanese and European releases, they helped many a UK gamer get their hands on a PSP without having to wait. But Sony claimed that exporting their hardware was in breach of their trademark rights. Lik-Sang continued to sell the units, claiming Hong Kong's laws allow an item to be traded freely once it appears in a market anywhere in the world. But after intense legal pressure, Lik-Sang collapsed under the might of Sony's lawyers, and on 24th October 2006, Lik-Sang's website became a single page informing customers that they were out of business. The same page listed names of Sony employees outside Japan, who in frustration at waiting for their own unit had imported from Lik-Sang. It left a sour taste in the mouth of many a gamer, and following the incident many other Asian exporters like Play-Asia have stopped exporting any Sony hardware for fear of going the same way.

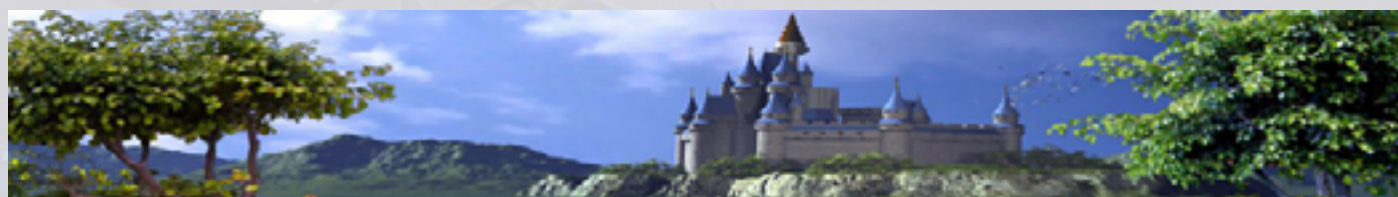
After a very impressive start, sales of PSP have tailed off substantially. It hasn't been treated by

publishers and developers as a handheld console, and as such. Whilst Nintendo's DS dominates the handheld market with games designed for a handheld like Brain Training and Nintendogs selling countless millions of copies, PSP owners have mostly been snapping up ports of Need For Speed titles and numerous games featuring topless rappers on steroids, with the games more suited to the platform like LocoRoco and Exit gathering dust on store shelves. Despite breaking all kinds of sales records on launch, Sony now lag behind Nintendo in the struggle for handheld dominance. Sony, who only release shipped-to-retailers figures, have so far managed to get 25 million PSPs into stores. Nintendo, by contrast, has managed to get over 40 million DS units into the pockets of gamers.

The potential of PSP is huge, and with truly great, original games like Lumines, Dexter and LocoRoco available, it is clear that it's a machine that's capable of innovate handheld gaming. The big problem it now faces is that it isn't being treated by developers as a handheld, but as a portable PlayStation 2, and with Nintendo DS delivering all-new handheld experiences like Brain Training, it is turning into the runaway success that Sony hoped PSP would be, which is a great shame when this is clearly a very special machine but one that, in practice, equates to far less than the sum of its



Pro Evolution Soccer 5: An almost perfect port of the PS2 game, a perfect technical showcase.



World Of Warcraft: diary of a n00b

7.5 million people can't be wrong, but any MMORPG can be daunting for a newcomer. Sprite jumps into the mystical world of WOW and hits things with a big stick...

Day One

Rather inexplicably, possibly due to the number of graphics cards I sell and the amount of joy that people have with them (ooh-err), I suddenly decided that I at last wanted to go beyond the onboard limitations of my computer. A Radeon 9800 Pro is ordered, and following a mad rush to the nearest ('nearest' is all relative when it involves being stuck in heavy traffic on the way to Croydon) Toys'R'Us I bring home copies of The Sims 2 and World of Warcraft.



Day Two

Installation day, for both the card and the games. Most exciting when I finally get home... and realise I have 250MB worth of downloads to get going. No matter! Will pop to the cinema and watch Serenity again whilst it gets on with it. Return at gone midnight and decide to just take a peek and see what World of Warcraft is like. Kaywinnit, Tauren druid, is born.

Well, it certainly looks pretty.

Tentatively I attempt this keyboard-control nonsense. Like a well-trained circus monkey (no offence to circus monkeys) I find it quite easy to both move and jump and read things and all sorts... all at the same time! This is where the mouse comes in handy (Lister are you reading?) because you can move forward and click on something at the same time! I decide to put my new-found talents to good use and approach what appears to be a deformed emu. I click it with the left mouse button and its name pops up – Plainstrider or thereabouts. I try the right mouse button. Oh! I hit it! Go me! But now it's hitting back, ah... bugger. Time to run back to the safety of town and so instead I make the Taurens there say things in gruff voices like "may the eternal sun shine upon thee" – lovely, but it's 1am.

Day Three

This time, I get invited to a (lovely, charming, wonderful) guild and so have people to ask questions of when I fall into ravines I didn't know existed. They also supply me with things like silver and bags and as everybody knows, the female of the species can never have enough bags.

I even embark on a quest or two. Imagine my joy when my character levels up! This means that when I hit things with a big stick it happens 0.00001% faster. (This is a lie, I'm not sure to what extent things change, to be honest).

It's rather addictive stuff, though. I even make it into the next town where there are trainers who want to teach me new shiny skills. By now I've even figured out how to use a couple of the spells I have and am well on my way to becoming a master of the druid class.

Until I get attacked by a couple of wolves and find that my spirit returns to a graveyard, the graphics reflecting a ghostly plane and my new task is to find the corpse that I've left behind.

Well, I certainly feel humbled.

Day Four

Just stood up. Finding that my leg muscles have completely fallen asleep, my back is lodged in a computer chair shape and my eyes hurt from staring at the screen too long. Time to sleep. Shouldn't be allowed to have days off from work if this is the result.

Day Five

Had a social life before World of Warcraft. Doesn't really matter, though, as I am perfectly occupied with the ongoing quest to get better equipment and weapons. I am now also a skilled herbalist and alchemist, not to mention cook (don't tell my mum). Have taken up fishing and first aid so I anticipate being asked to help out with the Red Cross before too long. The line between reality and virtual reality is beginning to blur somewhat.

Day Six

Now have new social life. Consists of orcs, trolls, undead and big cows who dance and flirt with me.

Day Seven

Beginning to worry about my sanity, but that doesn't matter because I can now change into a bear and roar with bestial vigour... ROARR!

Day Fourteen

I am now also able to take the form of a sealion and a cat, therefore fulfilling most of my life's ambitions in the space of two weeks. Feel never-ending compulsion to finish 'just one more quest' and seek out people to attempt them with. Also find amusement in poking fun at the names of others when they call me rude things – "Kittensoft" for example, I merely pointed out that his name reflected a brand of toilet paper.

Have been unable to keep diary up to date due to ongoing commitments. First and foremost, must keep going to work so that I can get money to pay monthly subscription. Must also sleep, eat and perform other basic functions so that I can survive. To forget to do these things would be careless of me, as my druid would then go neglected. One has to have one's priorities in order.



Zero Hour: 360 gets underway

Trousers travelled to a far and distant desert to be the first UGVM resident to see the new generation. Apparently you can't win over everyone with giant green beanbags...

Imagine the scene if you will, you've just grabbed your emails for the day and not only can you lose 10 pounds in 3 days as well as become immune from numerous ailments including death but there's an email nestled in there telling you that you won tickets to go to LA and attend the launch of the Xbox 360 console. Now imagine you've got a wife who is 6 months pregnant with various baby things still to buy and you've got to pay for your own travel and accommodation over there. When I pick a wife I pick a good one though and despite having let me go to the Champions League final in May she grants me the proverbial "pass out" and the hunt begins for a travel companion. Two phone calls later and Dean is on board having also married a suitably excellent wife.

Two 35 year old pasty northern fat boys hit LA on the Saturday having upgraded our hire car to a convertible to make sure our heads end up a healthy shade of scarlet in the 90 degree heat. When I say "Hit LA" I do of course mean drive around aimlessly trying to find the hotel for a couple of hours then collapsing into bed at a ridiculously early hour. The following day we should really have been at Zero Hour for the launch on the evening but instead copped a superficial feel of Juliette Lewis as she stage dived at the Troubadour.



Good reason to not take a piss outside. Willy death.

We arrived at Zero Hour on the Monday morning having decided to see how hard we could make our nipples by joining the freeway with the roof down and driving 60 odd miles through some polar winds. Having thawed out we find the hangar where Zero



Ridge Racer 6 picture review: The expression says it all really. A big, resounding 'meh'.

Hour is being held and decide no matter how full the toilets are we won't be going outside the venue for a potty stop (see below left).

The registration procedure was fairly painless and we met some other English guys who were also attending the event. Luckily the 'alright bloke' to 'complete git' ratio of these chaps was 3 to 1 which rose to an even higher ratio when we met another guy who was amusing us highly mature older blokes by asking American girls if they knew anywhere that he could get a wank. Thankfully they had no idea what he was on about.

Once inside Zero Hour we discovered that getting on a decent game was next to impossible so I got onto one of the many spare Ridge Racer pods and whipped up a quick pictorial review (top right). Please note the controller isn't actually that small – I have hands like bloody great shovels.

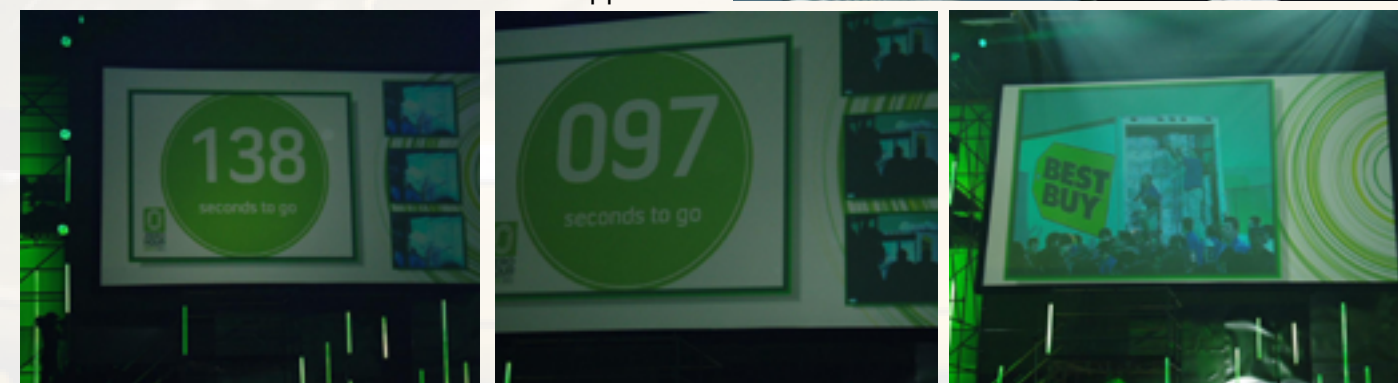
After we had been inside for an hour or so grabbing as much free stuff as possible (to be fair to Microsoft there was a hell of a lot of free goodies available) I had a bit too much green overload so we made our way to the beer tent expecting to fight our way through to the bar. There was, in fact, only us English lads in there but I'm sure we managed to contribute to Microsoft's running costs of the show and any losses incurred on the first batch of Xbox 360's by forking out £3 odd a go for some gas with a hint of lager. I was starting to suspect, at this point, that our commitment to Xbox 360 was perhaps not as intense as the majority at the event.

Actually playing the games didn't help that commitment much either. Project Gotham 3 was shinier than PGR2 but the same game otherwise, Fifa Road to World Cup was a jerky uncontrollable mess, Need for Speed Most Wanted was a lovely slide show and multi-player Quake 4 was about as smooth as Clint Eastwood's chin in a Spaghetti Western. Yes they all looked nice and shiny and reflective and high res but when they are jerking all over the shop (PGR3 being a notable exception) then all that visual frippery is for nothing. To be fair though I did enjoy playing Perfect Dark Zero and Call of Duty 2 but good as they were for me neither were the kind of game that would make the console a must buy.

As we stood outside the beer tent trying to find some lager in our gas a completely insane Microsoft guy decided to treat us to a stream of profanity along with some thoughts on Sony. These thoughts were as follows (edited for a family audience). "Yeah the PS3 sounds good but if you put lipstick on a chicken it's still a chicken" and "I remember this guy who said he could kick himself in the head and we didn't believe him but it turned out he could do it – so maybe Sony are going to kick themselves in the head". We made our excuses and left before he tried to eat us.

At 6:00pm they let people start queuing to buy their consoles and a huge queue sprang up around the entire venue even though the consoles would not be available until 9:00pm. Yet again this seemed to point the finger of apathy at me as I thought "bugger that" and played some more games and inflated my gut with a bit more lager/gas hybrid. At around 8:50pm the excitement level began to rise and a lot of over excited Americans started whooping and hollering as some Best Buy trucks drove into the hangar. A countdown appeared in the large screen which would surely herald the arrival of Bill Gates or, at the very least, Jesus. It counted down inexorably towards the launch time and I took the liberty of recording this for posterity.

Despite my general level of cynicism I felt a flutter excitement about what could happen when the countdown reached zero. Guess what happened?



The highlight of the show: the countdown to watching some lorries being unloadad...

Shop monkeys unloading some boxes. Such excitement eh? It bears using the same clothing based review technique for this occasion (see below).



We ended up leaving about 10:00pm and it's fair to say I had a really good day and kudos to Microsoft for holding the event and handing out copious amounts of free stuff. As a promotional extravaganza though it did very little to persuade me to buy a 360 and the one I did buy went straight on ebay with only a very slight tinge of regret. I was late to the party with the current Xbox so still have a lot of quality titles to get my teeth into on that before I think about investing in a new console. As I said to the wife when I found out she was pregnant – there's life in the old box yet.

Update - May 2006

So I bought one last month and it's the best thing ever. Can't a man admit he's wrong? What's worse is I based my rash decision to get one on seeing Fight Night Round 3 in action and listening to the graphics whore in me shouting BUY BUY BUY.

I also changed my initial review of Ridge Racer but kept the clothing based theme.



the ugvm best games ever 2006

It's impossible to universally decide on the best game ever made. Year after year, magazines and websites publish their lists, compiled either by the writers or the readers, of the best games ever made, and, despite knowing how much we'll disagree with them, year after year we continue to read them and get frustrated by the inevitable stupidity that lies within (IGN's Reader Top 100 had Smackdown Vs. Raw 2006 a whole 27 places ahead of Shenmue, and there's still a hole in the

wall left from the chair throwing). Yet we can't help but read them, irrelevant as they are, we just like getting wound up by the ludicrous assertions of others. So we made our own. Everyone in the ugvm hierarchy got to vote on their top ten games of all time. The results were perhaps predictable in some places, with some rather unexpected gems popping up in others. And so, as discussed by **Zomoniac** and **The Rev**, the ugvm best games ever 2006 chart goes a little something like this...

20. Call Of Duty 2

Xbox 360, PC

At a time when the market was completely saturated with hundreds of "me-too" World War 2 FPS games, it needed something very special to stand out amongst the crowd. With an almost 80% attach rate in North America with the Xbox 360 console launch, COD2 managed it, with stunning graphics, deafening sound and tons of atmosphere. Its evil but Gamerscore-heavy Veteran difficulty and popular online multiplayer mode ensure that, a year after release and in the shadow of its successor, COD2 remains one of the most played games on Xbox 360.



19. Final Fantasy VII

PlayStation, PC

This was many people's first taste of a traditional Japanese RPG, a new army recruited by television adverts and magazine reviews. The first casualties occurred when the graphics from the television turned out to be unrepresentative cut-scenes and not the game. A few hours further into the game many, many more had fallen, cut down by a slow opening of long, wordy dialogue sequences and random battles that seemed to consist of choosing "Attack" over and over. Those that remained, though, were battle-hardened... and they were hooked. Meals were skipped and sleep deprivation set in as the story twisted and the fights became more intense and a whole world opened up before them.



18. Metal Gear Solid

PlayStation, PC

Where do you stand on Psycho Mantis? He's either the boldest, most head-spinning boss in gaming history or an annoyance who destroys sense of disbelief and leaves you frowning and tutting in the direction of the TV screen. Either way, you can't shake him off once you've met him. It's his presence that defines the whole game. If you love Psycho Mantis the game takes possession of you and doesn't let go. If you hate him, well, you might still enjoy creeping up on guards and the VR side missions, but you'll never truly love Metal Gear Solid.



17. Super Mario World

SNES, GBA

Think of the bright cartoon graphics. Think of the catchy tunes. Think of the wonderfully designed levels. Think of the almost perfectly pitched level of difficulty. Think of Yoshi, then a new addition to the series. Think of the switch palaces. Think of the ghost houses, in all their spooky, mind-warping glory. Think of the secrets, the alternate routes, extra levels and, of course, the Star Road. It wasn't a revolution, but it was finely-tuned, good-looking, well-polished and, maybe most of all, it was very, very generous.



16. Shenmue

Dreamcast

Graphically way ahead of its time, Shenmue was the first game to successfully create a living, breathing, believable world. You get up in the morning and walked into town, pass your neighbours going about their daily business, pop into the arcade to play some Hang-On, and then at 5pm watch all the shop-keepers close up for the day and walk home, before grabbing a drink in a bar and sitting in the park with your girlfriend. Everyone was alive, and somehow human. Because of this, the gripping story of your father's murder and the revenge you seek has an emotional power like no other, because these are real people, even though they're not. You could completely disregard the story (it's very easy to do) but to do so would be to miss the point of Shenmue, the action, the passion and the power of a true masterpiece.



15. Speedball 2

Amiga

Despite its placing in the chart, not a single ugvm had any nice words to say about the Bitmap Bros classic Amiga extreme sports title. You'll just have to assume it's good.



14. Tetris

Game Boy

Alexey Pajitnov's block-slotting puzzler is quite possibly the most popular and best known video game ever made. With over 30 million units sold on Game Boy alone (probably in excess of 100 million when the countless variations on other platforms are considered), Tetris was a game with a universal appeal due to the simplicity of its controls and concept, and the painfully addictive qualities it possessed.



13. GoldenEye 007

Nintendo 64

It is generally accepted that rules have exceptions, and every time the rule that all movie to game adaptations are rubbish, the same exception is always brought forward. A FPS on a console at a time when such a thing was regarded as heresy, it was a brave move from Rare to try and capture the Bond spirit in this fashion. But they succeeded in creating an atmospheric game with accurate locations, great levels, great weapons, the best cheat system ever devised, challenging difficulty levels and a four-player mode that kept many, many people up until the early hours. Despite two generations of successors and countless imitations, GoldenEye still sets the standard for split-screen multiplayer.



12. Halo: Combat Evolved

Xbox

Space marines shooting aliens is not a new concept in video games. Yet despite this, Halo was seen as a breath of fresh air. It wasn't so much that Halo broke new ground, although its two-weapon system has since been much copied, but Halo did everything so well that it didn't need to do much new. Mindblowing console graphics, stunning digital sound, great levels (mostly), great weapons, a compelling story, a powerful score, brilliant AI, a competitive multiplayer mode to rival GoldenEye's and a co-operative multiplayer mode without equal all added up to make one of the most dramatic gaming experiences of all time, and that is why Halo is the face of Xbox, the game that single-handedly made the platform.



11. Civilization series

PC

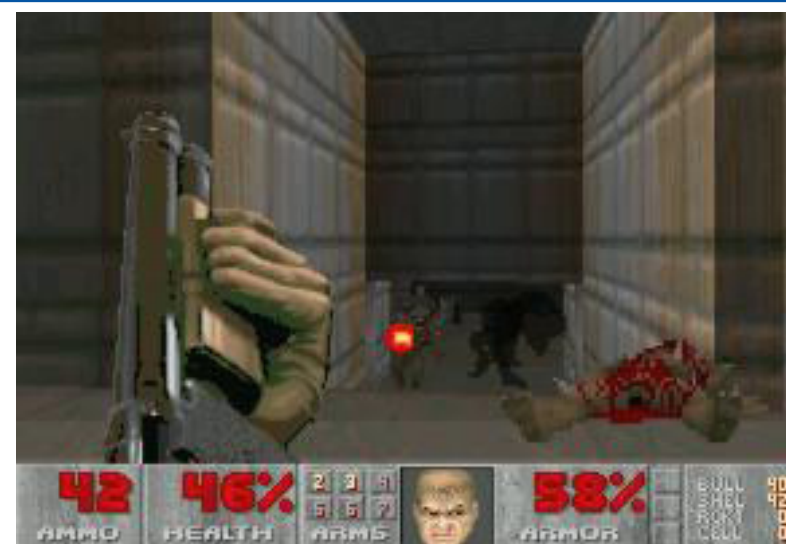
Get home from work. Start small. A single unit lost in vast, blank expanse. Explore, a little. Build a city. Create some units to defend it, then to go out exploring. Grow a little. Another city over by the sea, then another on a fertile plain. Defeat some roving barbarian hordes. Meet some more civilised neighbours. Fall into an uneasy peace. Start to think bigger. Those cities look so tempting. Declare war. Invade. The success or failure of this war will decide the next thousand years of your nation's story. Hold your breath. Blink. Look at clock. Five in the morning. Not worth going to sleep now, might as well play through until it's time to leave for work. Civilization is epic, addictive and not a little dangerous.



10. Doom

PC

The graphics, once amazing, no longer inspire a sense of awe. The violence, so graphic in its day, now fails to shock. So what's left? Just the most fluid, perfectly designed, fast-paced FPS there's ever been. And the shotgun is still the best weapon ever to appear in a video game. Doom rocked the world in '93 and it still rocks now.



9. Advance Wars

Game Boy Advance

Whilst turn-based strategy is as old as the hills, there was something strangely new and refreshing about Advance Wars. A fun, cartoony GBA game, it allows you to command army squadrons against a series of CPU battalions. Each different piece can move a set number of places on the board per go (with the number of places also varying based on the terrain they are crossing) as well as shoot different distances, so careful strategy and planning is essential to make progress. It's mostly all been done before, but never so perfectly. The save-and-resume-anytime system makes it the ideal handheld game, as it can be played in bursts as short as 30 seconds, but is so addictive that any game will quickly be running into the hours.



8. Super Monkey Ball

Gamecube

Originally a Gamecube launch title, Super Monkey Ball is a game about monkeys in balls. Already this elevates it to great heights. By a stroke of good fortune, the game is also fantastic, a 3D take on Marble Madness featuring some crazy levels through which you must navigate your rolling symian. Best of all though, are the party games. With a few friends and beers, endless great times can be had with the likes of Monkey Race (like Mario Kart but better and more frantic), Monkey Target (a landing your flying monkey on a floating island with numbers on type of game), and Monkey Fight (where each monkey has a giant boxing glove which can be made bigger with power ups, and must roll around the stage knocking off the competition).



7. Gran Turismo 4

PlayStation 2

The original Gran Turismo changed the racing genre forever. Featuring vast numbers of upgradeable and tunable real-life cars, amazing graphics, convincing physics and a huge array of tracks and tournaments as well as the licensing system, it was brilliant. Fast forward three versions, a few spin-offs and a hardware generation and you get Gran Turismo 4, with almost photo-realistic visuals improved handling and physics, over 700 cars, over 50 tracks and years worth of tournaments, as well as photo and B-spec modes. The racing king rules on.



6. Half-Life

PC

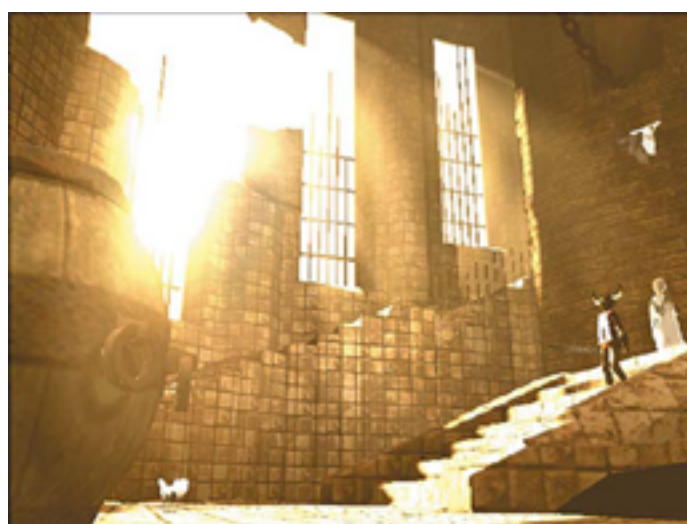
Games tell a story by dragging you out of the action and making you read text or watch a video. This has always been the way. Then along came Half-Life, a game that single-handedly rewrote the book on the FPS. Gone were the mindless gun-fests and macho rock music, Half-Life was about immersion, about a new experience. The story was told in the game, every 'cut-scene' and set piece was fully controllable, to the opening credits where you can move around a train carriage to watching people fall down an elevator shaft, you are always in control. If you don't want to see it, you can just turn around. Due to its immensely popular Counterstrike add-on, Half-Life remains one of the most played games in the world 10 years later.



5. Ico

PlayStation 2

Gaming and emotion seldom go hand in hand. Ico was like nothing that had gone before it, and nothing that has followed. Taking control of the eponymously named character, a small boy locked in a castle due to his horns, it is your task to escape the castle with the strange, ghost-like princess, Yorda. Yorda doesn't speak your language, so in order to build up a trust you have to hold her hand and lead her around, sometimes having to leave her to make progress and putting her at the mercy of the shadow monsters that appear whenever Yorda is left unattended for any period of time. With almost no music, eerie sound effect and a huge sense of scale, loneliness and intimidation from the castle, Ico produces atmosphere never seen before or since in gaming, and has an ending that will rip at your soul.



4. GTA: San Andreas

PlayStation 2/Xbox

It's an adventure playground. Instead of a slide there are some cars to be stolen. Instead of the swings, some guns to collect. Instead of the climbing frame, there's a huge world to explore. Instead of... well, you get the idea. The difficulty curve was all over the place, the story less than compelling to many... but the world was wonderful.



3. Elite

BBC

A revelation. At a time when games were boasting of having "twenty screens of arcade action" along came a game which gave you a whole universe to play around it. Unless you were very good, you'd probably never become Elite. Many of us couldn't even dock at a space station without having a computer to do it for us. But we still had fun, fighting local pirates and dreaming of the stars that lay beyond our reach. It was our first taste of freedom.



2. Zelda: Ocarina Of Time

N64

Zelda games have tickled the hearts of gamers for years, but none more so than Link's first N64 outing. The first 3D Zelda game, Ocarina Of Time saw Link immersed in a huge, seemingly lifelike world. With full analogue control, the ability to lock onto and sidestep around enemies, the appearance of horse Epona and the variety of sidequests and minigames that were present, Ocarina Of Time was a revelation, with beauty, passion and innovation.



1. Super Mario 64

N64

Nintendo 64's main launch title is officially the best game ever, and not without good reason. Super Mario 64 was pretty much perfect, with an completely new, completely revolutionary control system, a user-controllable camera and a vast array of levels that could be taken on in the order of your choosing, all offering a variety of different game types, coupled with the best graphics seen at the time, made this a must-have title. Its re-release on DS may have been disappointing, but anyone playing it again will witness one of the signs of a truly great game; it hasn't aged a bit.





Gears Of War

Move over Halo, the new big boy is here. Zomoniac revs up his chainsaw...

There have been few games more hyped than Gears Of War. With sequels to successful games excepted, it's hard to think of any title so eagerly anticipated. Initially shown off when Xbox 360 was first unveiled, Epic's third-person action game promised a huge amount, and looked to be the perfect showcase for both the power of Xbox 360 and their own Unreal Engine 3 technology.

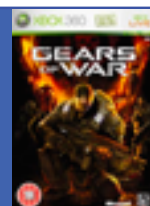
Arriving to huge critical acclaim, Gears Of War has been a major success. Its Wikipedia profile lists 39 awards from just 7 major organisations. The first game to top the most played game on Xbox Live chart since Halo 2 first took the crown in 2004, Gears has become the console multiplayer standard. But is that hype really deserved?

Much of the hysteria came as a result of the graphics. Quite simply put, Gears Of War is stunning. High-resolution textures everywhere, tons of effects, lifelike character models and huge gunfights all take place without a hitch in the frame rate. The gothic art direction and strangely homoerotic subtext might not be everyone's taste, but



Ex-con Marcus Fenix isn't a very likeable lead...

Developer:	Epic
Publisher:	Microsoft
Format:	Xbox 360
Released:	17/11/2006
Region:	UK



for now, and probably until very rich PC owners get a taste of Crysis, Gears Of War is without equal on a technical level.

But graphics do not a game make, and ignoring the largely ludicrous and irrelevant storyline, the rest of the game falls a little short. The sound is spot on, but the gameplay can at times feel a little grating. Using a third-person over-the-shoulder camera (not dissimilar to that seen in Resident Evil 4) which occasionally goes AWOL, Gears Of War has most of its action controls mapped to a context-sensitive A button. Holding A whilst walking will put you into 'Roadie Run' mode, a nice effect where the camera drops low and shakes while you sprint forward. But pressing A near a wall or object puts you into cover, meaning that whilst sprinting, you can quite often find yourself being sucked up against the side of a wall, which in the heat of battle can mean death before you've even realised what's happened.

There are five main 'acts' in Gears, and a small introductory training level. Each of these acts is divided up into up to five chapters, each containing an element of the story, which focuses on the planet Sera, and the chaos that ensues when an unpleasant, aggressive, very big and surprisingly well armed species known as the Locust appeared from under the ground. Going on rampages and appearing undetected through the ground in 'emergence holes', the Locust like to cause death and destruction by any means necessary. It's your job to stop them.



A chainsaw battle awaits, along with some very unsubtle blood-splattering.

You, being Marcus Fenix, start by escaping from prison and teaming with your partner Dom and the rest of Delta Squad. Most of the time Marcus and Dom will work together as a team, and if Dom is injured, it'll be up to you to reach him and press the magic A button to get him back to his feet. The problem being that Dom is rather useless, and will get injured very quickly, along with the rest of your team. In the heat of battle, this can leave you alone facing a horde of Locust and trying to reach them is often suicidal and can often hinder the single-player experience. Fortunately Gears Of War has a fantastic co-op mode, and either using split-screen or Xbox Live, a friend can drop into the game at any time you're playing (at your request) and take over the role of Dom, making life much easier and far less frustrating, with planned strategies and flanking manoeuvres proving far more effective with two people than the CPU AI.

The single-player game can seem quite short at 6 hours on Casual difficulty. But played on Hardcore mode it's a 10-12 hour action-packed romp and



The Locust are even less likeable, and have big guns.

feels about the right length, save for the painful difficulty spike at the final boss. The Xbox Live multiplayer mode will provide almost infinite replay value though. With a variety of game modes, all of them team based, it's proving to be a major success. The player limit is small, along with the map size, and competition is very fierce, but it's a lot of fun and can be quite addictive (so far around 500 people have acquired the ludicrous 'kill 10,000 people online' achievement).

With a few tweaks to the gameplay and a little more variety in the frankly repetitive duck-and-shoot mechanics, Gears Of War could've proved to be a masterpiece. It will be forever remembered, but mostly due to how incredibly far ahead of the competition it is technologically. Whilst it does many things right, with a mostly brilliantly implemented cover system and a great online component, there are enough little niggles in Gears Of War to hold it back. As a starting point it's spectacular, but hopefully the inevitable sequel will iron out the flaws to push it beyond the barrier to greatness that it so nearly reaches, but falls just short of.

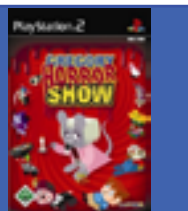
There is no doubt that Epic have succeeded in creating the most jaw-dropping game of all time. It is a technical marvel, and if you need a game to show yourself what your little box can do then you need it. As a game it's very, very good, but feels slightly lacking in key areas. Maybe next time.

4

ugvm
Silver Award

Gregory Horror Show

Developer: Capcom
 Publisher: Capcom
 Format: PlayStation 2
 Released: 12/05/2003
 Region: UK



deKay gives it the ugvm JUD-GER-MENT!

It isn't often that you get a game which manages to frighten you, make you laugh, cause hair loss, and force you to gasp in disbelief at scenes of vermin self-love. Even rarer is one with such a bizarre storyline and graphical style, and rarer still one that makes it out of Japan. Yet here it is, in all its square-headed, book-collecting, freakshow glory.

At first glance (helped along by the Capcom logo), Gregory Horror show would appear to be Resident Evil for Kids. It is set in a creepy mansion, after all, and you collect herbs to 'heal' yourself. In fact, there's even a zombie in it. Once you start playing, you soon realise that Gregory is less like Resident Evil, and more like a cross between Splinter Cell and something like the newer Broken Sword or Monkey Island games, all wrapped up in a Japanese TV show licence.

The story goes that you wander into Gregory House (a huge, dusty old hotel) late one night, and become trapped forever. Sort of, anyway. Gregory is a rat, who runs the hotel, and checks you in on your first night. You soon learn from the gothic zombie cat Neko that you're stuck here, unless you can recover lost souls from the other hotel guests, and give them to Death. Yes, to Death himself, whom you meet each time you go to sleep. Strangely, Death is one of the nicer characters you'll meet – since he doesn't try to stab you in the head with a giant syringe (like Catherine), or chop you up with a meat cleaver (like Hell's Chef). Instead, he will recover your sanity in exchange for recovered souls.

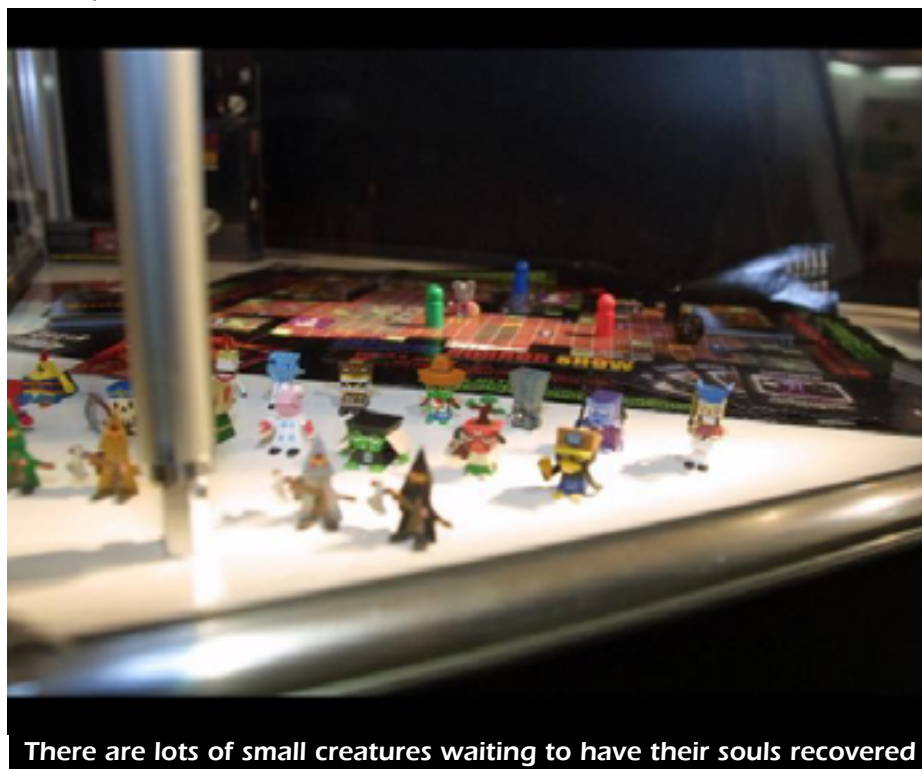
Ah yes, the sanity. Don't be expecting it to work like it does in Eternal Darkness – here, it acts like your energy bar. You have to keep it topped up by eating herbs and reading books you find (reading keeps you sane, it



A mouse making a plan, noted by Rabbi Burns

seems). It gradually dwindles with time, and can make you tired, or make it hard to see. In extreme circumstances, you can actually have your controls messed with, or the room sways. If your sanity drops to zero, it's game over and you're trapped for good.

A lot of the game is spent avoiding things. Each guest has a daily rota, as to where they go and what they do. Since some guests try to kill you (or rather, drain your meter) whenever they spot you, avoiding them is a good idea. One flaw in the game is that it is often trial and error as to who will chase you, and under what circumstances. For example, Catherine won't bother you until she

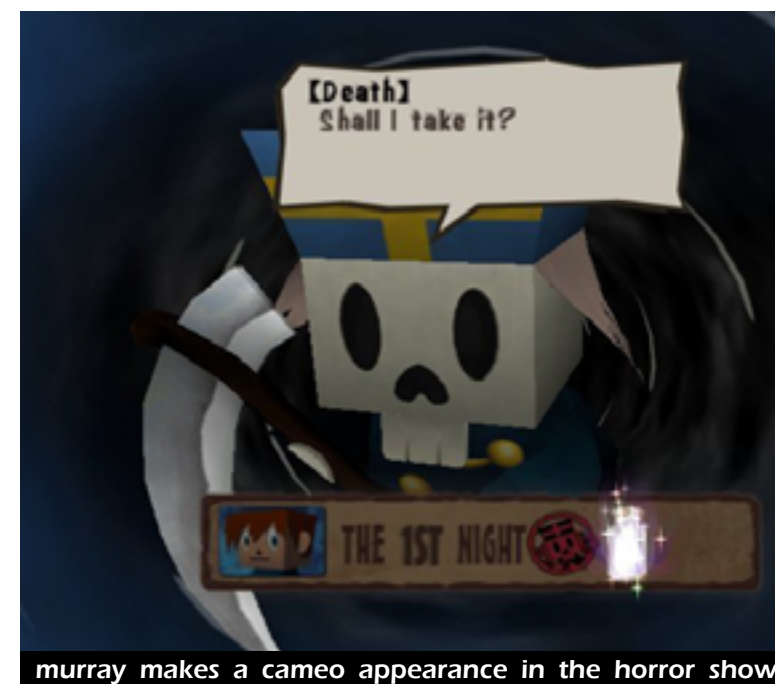


There are lots of small creatures waiting to have their souls recovered



brings back bad memories of sonic shuffle...

has her soul taken, but Judgement Boy (he of the "JUDGEMENT!" cry) won't ever try to kill you at all. These routines are important – especially later in the game as the number of guests increase and so you have to plan your routes carefully. Clock Master in particular is a pain in the bottom to 'defeat' as a result, partly because you have to get him to chase you for quite a while, without you running into any of the other guests who are out to get you. Actually obtaining the souls from guests varies from guest to guest. Some you will have to distract, others you will have to do something for



murray makes a cameo appearance in the horror show

them. Still others you will need to do something with something at a particular time (the rota thing again). Luckily, clues as to what to do can be gained from other guests – some by directly speaking to them, and others by spying on them. You see, you can (and indeed must) peek through keyholes and watch and listen to guests talking to themselves and others to find out exactly what you need to do.



he's broken it, no cheese today, what a jessie...

This causes the game to run at two paces – the slow watching and waiting game, where you are spying and avoiding, and the fast running away game.

The game's story is entertaining and actually quite gripping. As well as new guests, each 'night' (as the game is split up) brings a new revelation, as we are exposed to a bit more of the sinister background of Gregory House; notably Gregory Mama, Gregory's mother, who lives in dark depths of the house and has a thing for collecting Lost Souls. Each character also has their own storyline, and there is fair bit of interaction between the characters too. Just spy on Hell's Chef shouting at Gregory to find out his views on Catherine, for instance.

Unfortunately, Gregory Horror Show is a little short. You will probably complete it in about 12 hours, and shouldn't find anything too taxing along the way. The camera is also a little odd, and you will find yourself running around corners and not realising what direction you are supposed to be going when the camera flips position. Luckily, you have a map (once you find it, anyway), and you will find yourself referring to it constantly – not only to find out where you are, but also where all of the guests you need to see or avoid are – so it's a shame it isn't easier to access (you have to pause the game). Even better would have been a Doom-style superimposed map. Thankfully, when you know the layout of the hotel, and it isn't all that large, it does get easier to find your way around.

Gregory Horror Show is certainly something fairly original, and certainly enjoyable. It suffers from a few niggles which prevent it from being a truly great game, but is well worth a purchase regardless, especially since it is a budget release here in the UK.

3

Grand Theft Auto:

Liberty City Stories

GTA gets the 3D mini-port treatment, or does it? James Luff caps some hoes to find out...

Developer: Rockstar
Publisher: Take 2
Format: PSP
Released: 22/06/2006
Region: UK

This is the game that many people had been touting to be the first 'killer app' for the PSP. One that would get PSP's flying off

store shelves. Unfortunately it didn't manage that feat, mainly because Sony didn't have any PSP's on the shelves in order for them to fly off in the first place! However, if they had been there would this game have sold them? Let's take a closer look.



Portable virtual pr0n!

On first impressions you can't help but be blown away by the impressive feat that has been accomplished by bringing the 3D GTA series into the hand-held arena. The graphics look better than GTA 3 and everything you remember from that game is present in this one. Well, more or less because this game is set in 1998 a few years prior to the activities in GTA 3. This means some of the areas have subtle differences, one example is a construction site where a building appears in GTA 3 and shops with different names. The audio is also very impressive, everything is fully voice acted and you even get a selection of radio stations to listen



Vroooom! bikes are once again present and correct.

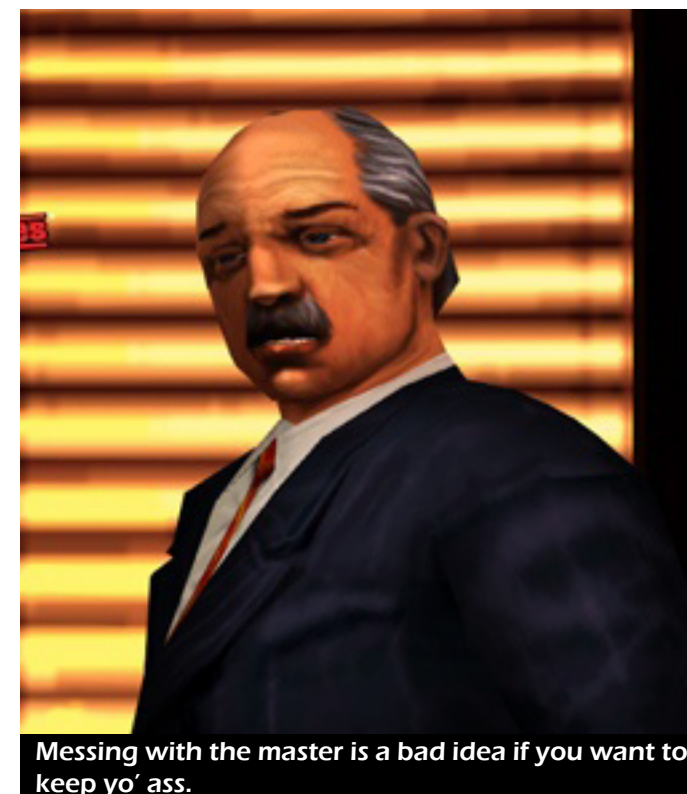
to as we have become accustomed to with the GTA series.

Anyone who has played a GTA game will be familiar with the set-up here as nothing has really changed. In this game you play Toni Cipriani who is a member of the Leone family who are essentially a Mafia organisation. You carry out missions on behalf of your boss Salvatore or any of the other numerous characters you meet along the way. The missions all follow the same tried and tested formula of previous incarnations, you will ferry people to and from locations, collect and deliver packages and assassinate characters who get in the way. Nothing new then but it is all executed well and delivers a huge challenge if you intend to complete the game.

The city is divided into three distinct islands and to start with you are stuck on Portland because the bridges that connect the islands haven't been built yet. But as the story develops more of the city is opened up to you, eventually giving you access to a huge playing area. The missions range from very simple hit and run tasks to extremely difficult multi-part nightmares. The main problems that afflict the harder missions are mainly down to the controls, an issue that perhaps shouldn't be levelled at the

game itself. However, when you have numerous police and gangsters opening fire on you it is hard not to get annoyed when the game insists on auto-aiming at a pedestrian! Also, why do the police hunt only you down when there are dozens of equally law breaking gangsters in the same location?

Ignoring these minor flaws for a moment this is



Messing with the master is a bad idea if you want to keep yo' ass.

a wonderful game with an engrossing story line which although strangely familiar delivers enough to make it new. People who played the original GTA 3 will feel at home with Liberty City Stories and those who like to go for 100% completion will be pleased to hear that there is plenty to keep them occupied outside of the core mission structure. Hidden packages, vigilante missions, paramedic missions are all present and correct along with all the old favourites.

This review wouldn't be complete without mentioning the other aspect to GTA : LCS which has been completely ignored so far: Multiplayer! Yes, this is the first GTA game (excluding the top down versions) to fully support multiplayer modes. In Liberty City Stories there are several modes including: Liberty City Survivor, a death match style mode; Protection Racket, where you have to defend Limousines at your base and then switch to attack them while your opponent defends and Get Stretch, similar to capture the flag but with a limousine rather than a flag. Tanks For The Memory is a king of the hill mode where you have to remain in the tank for as long as possible. The Hit List in which one player is wanted and everyone has to

attack him, and when you are wanted the objective is to survive as long as you can. Street Rage, a straight forward checkpoint race. The Wedding List, run around the city collecting cars and delivering them to the correct destinations.

A fairly extensive list that adds much to the game and really makes this a worthwhile purchase for the multi-player alone. There is a lot of variety in the different modes and the large areas make for some excellent fun when you have a few friends to play. You will need a copy of the game for each PSP though, no sharing options are available.

So to answer the question posed at the start of the review, did this game shift PSP's off the shelves?

Well it's a GTA game so almost certainly it did.



Are you lookin' at me bitch, you lookin' at me?

but it also deserves to at the same time. The only things that let the game down is the occasional really tough challenge and the awkward control mechanics. If you have never enjoyed a GTA game then there is nothing here that will change your mind. If you are a fan of the series though, this is a fine addition with only a few minor flaws which can be easily overlooked.

With news of a new GTA game for the PSP due in 2006 things are looking good for the future of the franchise. Perhaps we will find ourselves back in Vice City for the next instalment?

4

ugvm
Silver Award

James Luff takes a couple of DS games out for a spin...

Trauma Centre: Under The Knife

Developer: Atlus
Publisher: Atlus
Format: DS
Released: 28/04/2006
Region: UK

This is a game about surgery, it sounds odd and it is, a bit. The game puts you in the gloves of Dr Derek Stiles and with the help of the stylus you use various pieces of surgical apparatus to dissect and cure patients. Things start off with routine operations to extract broken glass and remove tumours but soon things start to get complicated when you discover GUILT. Without destroying the plot for you to much GUILT is medical terrorism. Fortunately you are a gifted surgeon who possesses the healing touch which basically slows down time and allows you to operate faster.



The gameplay all takes place on the operating table with you using the stylus as a scalpel, hypodermic needle, tweezers and other medical tools. It works very

well and the touch screen is used to great effect. You really get a feeling of being under pressure battling against both the clock and the patients vital signs.

The game starts to get very tough about half way through, and if anything this is what lets it down. The story is engrossing, if a bit predictable, and is told through anim  cut-scenes between operations. The sounds are sufficiently squelchy while the graphics do a good job of replicating the insides of a human.

This is a brilliant game which uses the touch screen to great effect. If you are looking for something a little bit different you can't go far wrong with this.

4

ugvm
Silver Award

Madden NFL 06

Developer: EA
Publisher: EA Sports
Format: DS
Released: 08/08/2005
Region: UK



The Madden NFL series has been going strong for many years on just about every game platform imaginable. This is the second instalment of the NFL franchise on the Nintendo DS and it still suffers from just about every flaw the first version did.

The graphics are substandard for a DS title and bear more resemblance to those found on the GBA. The controls are still twitchy and unresponsive, the sound samples are limited and repetitive. The sound quality is poor and the default levels have the crowd so loud that it drowns out everything else.

One of the most annoying aspects is the need to constantly switch between the d-pad and stylus. You use the touch screen to select which play you are about to use and then go to the d-pad to control the action. This disrupts

the flow of the game and has you hastily dropping the stylus before the timer runs down.

The DS deserves better than this, we all know roughly what the limits of the system are and this appears to fall well below them. This may be a deliberate marketing ploy by EA to prolong the life of the franchise, but you would only think that if you were extremely cynical.

At the end of the day the lack of any substantial new features and the complete failure to address any of last years shortcomings makes this a title to avoid. As it's the only NFL game out there for the DS you don't have much choice, so only consider this if you are desperate. Even then consider yourself warned!

2

Populous: The Beginning

Tim Miller's going to cast a spell on you...

The first Populous was an amazingly innovative game, casting the player as a god who could command his subjects to do whatever he wished, in order to defeat disbelievers and become the one true god of the land. The game, by Peter Molyneux, spawned a direct sequel (Populous 2) which simply upped the number of commands available

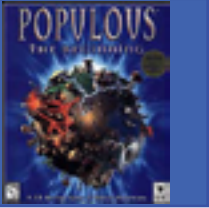
Maybe more interesting are the non-direct sequels, however. Many of Molyneux's games have centred on the same theme, of you acting as a god with control over your subjects. In recent times, however, control has been less directly on the actions of the believers, and more on control via a third vehicle. The most obvious example of this is Black and White, where the player controls a creature to a greater degree than the people



themselves. Populous: the Beginning was evidently the first step along this path. While the game shares a lot with the earlier Populous games, there are some very noticeable differences. The player designs their towns, indicating where houses and other buildings should go, unlike the autonomy of Populous. There are different buildings allowing people to learn different skills. There are often three enemies rather than a single one.

But the greatest difference is in the interface. In Populous, the player was allowed to cast spells, such as the earthquake or volcano, virtually anywhere on a map (with a few exceptions). Populous: the Beginning does not have the player casting spells directly, but instead a nominated shaman, who must be within a certain range in order to have influence. The shaman's sphere of influence varies by spell – a simple fireball has a low range, while the plague of hornets can be cast a further distance – but all spells will involve the shaman moving to a dangerous position near an enemy's village. Furthermore, spells are individually charged, so the

Developer: Bullfrog
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Format: PC/PlayStation
Released: 1998
Region: UK



player must decide which spells will be important and turn these 'on' with plenty of notice.

This move to personify the player's power has a huge impact on the way the game plays. The real-time aspect of the strategy is much more important than in the earlier Populous titles, where the player's interactions were confined to lowering land around the enemy to drown them. In Populous: the Beginning, the player can hit individual enemies (and opposing shamans) with fireballs or lightning; cast confusion charms which make opposing armies believe in the wrong god for a limited period (and therefore fight their comrades); and prevent their village from being burnt down through constant supervision of the fighting between armies. Although the player is no longer an all-powerful God, he does, in fact, have more power.

And power is what this game does best. The game is finely – and perfectly – balanced between the player having too much power (the ability to raise and flatten land in order to expand the village, the ability to command villagers to build a new temple or fighting dojo) and not having enough (with a low spell charge rate, the player can be helpless as an army of fighters and priests marches through the village). The player will frequently feel frustrated and excited simultaneously, but will never feel that the game has acted unfairly.

And the player will feel entertained. There's so little to fault in this game that everyone cannot help but to have fun playing it. The pacing is perfect, from the earlier, simple levels, to the difficulty of fighting three enemies who all wish to cross through your village.

The controls are intuitive and accurate. Even graphically, the game still looks very presentable, eight years after it was first released. The only downside is that the online servers have now been closed, denying new adopters the pleasure of a four way battle.

Online was never the focus of Populous: the Beginning. Instead, we have an amazingly-crafted strategy game that just works.

5

ugvm
Gold Award



FIFA 06: Road To FIFA World Cup

Zomoniac takes the first next-gen football game for a kickabout...

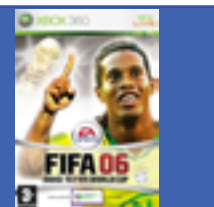
Another year, and another series of offensive EA cash-in titles, as ever. We've all grown used to it now, especially with the EA Sports ranges. So with the beginning of a new generation, EA has managed to get five games out for the launch of Xbox 360, four of them from the EA Sports teams. It would be fair to assume that all they will have done is to port the Xbox version across and put some high resolution textures in. For once, this isn't true, and in some ways it's a good thing, and in some ways it's a very, very bad thing.

Like NBA Live 06, another of EA's 360 launch titles, the first thing you'll notice about the game is the magic new loading screen. Unfortunately, FIFA's



Ulrika Jonsson fancied this man/zombie...

Developer: EA Sports
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Format: Xbox 360
Released: 02/12/2005
Region: UK



isn't anywhere near as good. NBA throws you straight into the astonishing interactive loading screen, you get to play around while it loads the menus, then once you choose your options you hang around a bit more before zooming in. It's far more dramatic. FIFA, on the other hand, loads the menus and the loading screen together, so you're stuck for about 15 seconds on a screen with Ronaldinho's spectacular teeth staring down at you. Then you choose your game options, then you get to do the whole playable loading screen. For about ten seconds. It takes longer to load the loading screen than to load the game, so whereas in NBA it feels like a huge, next-gen thing, here it seems like a nice idea that is ultimately pointless.

Once you're in the menus, you get to pick from the game modes. And the first thing that hits you is that there aren't any. FIFA 06 features 70 international teams, no club teams, a Road To World Cup mode, which requires you play a 5-game International Open tournament beforehand, custom knockout and league modes where you can build your own cups using the available teams, friendly and online modes. Not a right lot compared to FIFA 06 on Xbox's huge number of options. So a bad start there.

Then you get on to the pitch, surrounded by a beautifully rendered stadia with a fully 3D crowd, a pitch laid with stunning (if oddly long) grass, and players which are very hit and miss. Sometimes (namely during close-ups of Frank Lampard), the

game looks utterly fantastic. A lot of the time (especially during close-ups of Sven), it looks like a badly put together collection of laminated zombies. The animation of the players is very good for the most part, but they don't always blend together too well, but the little details make the difference, like the hi-res names and logos on shirts, the little ventilation holes on sleeves, the shadows on upper legs from the overhang of the shorts and the bulge on the socks where the shinpads are.

responds to the action on the pitch.

Then of course there's the list of problems, the most painful of which (besides the lack of content) is the frame-rate in replays and cut-scenes. The game usually runs along at a solid 60fps, dropping occasionally at corners, but during replays, for reasons nobody's sure of, it routinely drops down to (this is no exaggeration) 2-3fps, and it's just painful.



The next time the screen refreshes the ball will be firmly in the back of the Greek net...

Then you get to play the game. It feels very different to FIFA 06 on PS2 and Xbox, in a very good way. The passing is solid and fluent, allowing you to pass freely into space and giving you complete control as to where the ball goes, tackling has been completely refined so it actually works, and the movement around the midfield and AI of your teammates feels very natural. I hate to say it, but a lot of it is on par with Pro Evo 5. The shooting, however, is the weak spot. It never feels like you have any real control over it, but after a few games, shots start going closer to where you asked them to, however it seems to be impossible to get a shot to stay under the bar from distance, even if you only lightly tap the shoot button.

The audio is in a different league entirely from any other football game. The commentary from Martin Tyler and Andy Gray is very well done, but there's not enough there and it can get repetitive quite quickly, but the crowd noise is where it comes into its own. With a decent surround setup turned up it's deafening, and scarily realistic, authentic chants (it's coming home!) and a crowd that actually

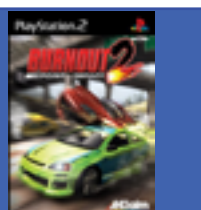
FIFA 06: RTWC could be a brilliant game. It plays better than any FIFA to date, and much better than the 90% complete code we played a few weeks before launch. It's come on such a long way gameplay-wise over the current-gen console versions that I really want to give it an 4, but the fact that EA think they can put this much content in a game and charge £49.99 for it is beyond a joke. We wish we could recommend this, but the complete lack of longevity and the size of the problems that do exist mean that we can only suggest buying it if you're someone who could lose £50 and not notice. For everyone else, hopefully FIFA 07 will correct all the issues and put a game on the disc because this, for all its good points, is taking the piss.

There is huge potential here. Sadly, EA with all their cynicism refuse to take advantage of it. But with some more time to iron out the problems that have come from a rushed launch title, and ignoring the inevitable cash in that World Cup 06 will be, FIFA 07 could well turn out to be a masterpiece.

2

Burnout 2

Developer: Criterion Games
 Publisher: Acclaim
 Format: Xbox/PS2/GC
 Released: 02/10/2002
 Region: UK



Michael Cargill hits the crash barrier in slow motion over and over again...

Firstly, for those that sneer at the mere thought of racers that aren't buttock clenchingly realistic or don't give the option to adjust all manner of metal objects under the hood of the car, turn your blasphemous cheeks the other way and have them flayed. This game is about as realistic as an origami peacock, and as arcadey as Brighton Pier during happy hour.

For those of you who played the first Burnout, everything will be pleasingly familiar. Everything that made the original game so good has been added upon and made all the much more fun. If you haven't had the pleasure of playing the first game, then it works like this – you choose a car, choose a track and race on it. Use some turbo, avoid the traffic, beat the computer cars and drive fast. And have fun by the bucket load.

The tracks in this game aren't your traditional type – they are 'urban' type tracks, taking place in cities, airports and in some cases mountains. So, partially urban.. This means that you get plenty of traffic on the roads that you have to avoid and use to your advantage. The key to winning the races in this game is by building up your turbo meter and using it to rocket past your opponents. This meter can be filled by doing a few ker-azy things, all of which are outlined during the six or so quick training courses that you go through when you start the game. Power slides, getting 'air' by driving off the humps in the road, skimming past other cars and racing into the oncoming traffic all boost up your meter. Once it is filled, hold down the turbo button and watch your speed almost double for about ten seconds. Don't relax whilst you do this, though – if you keep up the dangerous driving, then your boost meter will fill up in the background. Do it enough and when your boost meter runs out, you will have another crack at the nitro-fuelled frolics. You can do this multiple times, which is called a Burnout Chain – on some tracks you can get chains of up to 8 or 9 at a time. Needless to say, driving that fast through the oncoming traffic can require some hefty doses of concentration. Make a slip, and you could end up crashing into an oncoming juggernaut. Ah, the crashes.

One of the pre-release hypes about the original game were the crashes that occurred when cars hit each other. They were quite well done and pretty entertaining, but they are even better in the sequel. Your car will basically take off and ricochet off everything that is in its way. Your bumper, bonnet and wheels will go flying off in all directions. 'Tis most amusing the first few times it happens, and the appeal of it never seems to wear off. Indeed, there is even a whole mode based around crashing into things.

The main game offers you various championship races to progress through – the first one consists of only three races, but the later ones will have you doing quite a few races before you can claim the winner's cup. You score points according to your finishing position, and coming first at the end of it all unlocks more championships, other game modes and extra vehicles. To unlock everything though, you will need to win each and every race. It's when you win each race in a championship that the bonus stuff is made available. You get some 'Face Off' races, with you just racing against one CPU car – beating it makes that car available for selection in all other game modes.

Much more fun though, are the 'Pursuit' modes – you control an American police car, and have to ram the opponent off the road in classic Chase HQ style. And yes, you can turn the police siren on if you want. After you have completed a few of these Pursuit races, it appears as an option on the title screen. The basis is exactly the same, but you get to choose the target car, the car you drive and the course that you potter about on.



"Do not attempt to recreate these scenes in real life"

Another mode to be unlocked is 'Crash'. Here, you have to cause as much damage as possible. There are plenty of stages to choose from, although many of them are pretty similar. You start at one end of the short course, and somewhere in the middle will be a whole load of vehicles driving about – you have to get as much speed as you can, and slam into one of them. You then get a slow-mo view of the resulting carnage, with your car usually flying right up in the air. Seeing three petrol tankers jack-knife into each other, and smash into a couple of buses



141mph in a truck is asking for trouble, not that trouble's a bad thing

in slow motion is great stuff. To get the highest scores, you need to aim for the multipliers – for each individual collision that occurs, the multiplier count increases by one. Seeing millions of dollars worth of damage unfolding before your eyes is something to smirk at forever.

Graphically, Burnout 2 is certainly a looker. The graphics on the Xbox and GameCube have been given a spruce up from the PS2 version. The reflections on the cars look pretty spanking, as does the sun glare on the tarmac. When it rains, the effect is quite nice, with the roads throwing up some fancy looking light reflections. When you power slide around a corner, the tyres do a fair bit of smoking – this looks especially good when you are trailing behind a car that is screeching its way round a bend. The only iffy graphical moments come when you aren't moving (usually just after a crash). Some of the textures on the roadside and the trucks look a bit blurry and slightly unconvincing, but otherwise it all looks good. Another bonus is that it all nips along at a constant 60 frames per second.

The sound isn't something to be embarrassed about, either. The Xbox version has full 5.1 Dolby Surround Sound support, and all the engine noises sound as you would expect. Some of the cars have those funky dump valve systems for the gears – even if you hate them in real life, hearing it in the game is great as you nip passed a whole fleet of cars coming towards you.

The music on offer varies between dance tracks, and some cheesy rock music. If you preferred the original Burnout game's music, then you can choose to listen to that instead. As with most racing

games on the Xbox, you can listen to your own custom soundtracks. Burnout 2 also has the nice option of allowing you to skip a track mid race – a quick press of the B button, and it jumps onto the next one.

The more social racers among you can cheer at the prospect of some two-player split-screen action. Don't miss out on the opportunity of shoving your mate into a group of six cars. In an act of complete criminality, the game doesn't support system link at all. This is a vast disappointment to those who like to play on their own screen in mulitplayer sessions, and is a huge missed opportunity.

One good thing that the game does have is Xbox Live support – albeit only for the high scores. You won't be racing against your online

chums, unfortunately. There are plenty of scores and times for you to compare against your mates, though – stuff like the biggest Burnout Combos, longest power slide, longest jump, most damage in a race, most damage in a crash, and of course all the best times for all the courses (For those with Xbox Live, you can add me to your Friends list and see how you fared against my fumbling's in the game. My Gamertag is 'Mike Mentalist').

In summing up, this game is great stuff. You will complete the main championship mode pretty quickly, but you then get another one that opens up – and this is a fair bit harder. The courses in this game are considerably better than in the original. They feel much more 'solid' with more depth to them. Watching your car pinging off the buildings that surround the course can be smile-inducingly funny. The game is a bit more lenient with regards to crashing into other cars as well – you don't get punished for just brushing against them now. There are more opportunities to build up your boost meter as well, which adds to the fun and hijinks.

I reckon that even those who don't normally like racing games should give this a go – its very easy to control, and you will have mastered the handling by your third corner. Fans of the original game certainly won't be disappointed, as its more of the same but lots better.

Buy it, or forever be at the mercy of small children pointing at you in the street and small dogs yapping at your feet.

5

ugvm
Gold Award



Project Gotham Racing 3

PGR is back, but this time it's in hi-def. Zomoniac puts pedal to the metal...

Driving cars is fun. It's highly dangerous to make it fun, but it's fun all the same. Which is why videogames with cars were invented. They simulate the fun and eliminate the risk. In real life one is not encouraged to see how fast they can do handbrake turns around Trafalgar Square. But we've all wanted to do it, and that's why we have Project Gotham Racing 3.

Bizarre Creations have been making brilliant racing games for years. 10 years ago they released Formula 1 on PlayStation, to unanimous praise and many people declaring it to be the best racing game ever created. It was a game that pushed new boundaries in racing games, as was their next generation racer, Metropolis Street Racer. So who better to create the flagship racer for the new generation? But the question now is have they pushed those boundaries again, or is it more of the same?

To be quite honest, it is more of the same, and to some that may be a bad thing. To this reviewer it isn't. The new things that are included, while not revolutionary changes, are enough to make



A Ferrari and really long, straight bridge. Hmm...

Developer:	Bizarre Creations	
Publisher:	Microsoft	
Format:	Xbox 360	
Released:	02/12/2005	
Region:	UK	

it more than a worthwhile purchase. As the game to promote the HD era, it looks utterly stunning, as is to be expected. About 80 perfectly modelled supercars, 4 cities modelled to the point where they often look completely real, along with every imaginable route around the Nurburgring, all come together to make PGR3 arguably the best looking game currently around. The reflections are spot on, with the cars showing exactly what's next to you in perfect detail, and the motion blur is well implemented, enough to detract from the fact that the game runs at 30fps rather than 60, but not so much as to become a distraction.

But that's not to say the graphics are perfect. The textures can at times look a little lower in resolution than one would expect, and the countdown into a race is often a showcase of texture pop-in, as buildings seem to instantly change from towers of blur into beautiful recreations of the real thing in front of your eyes. The loading times for races are too long as they are, but I for one would rather have waited on the loading screen for an extra three seconds to allow the textures to load than watch them appear before me.

In terms of gameplay, if you've played PGR2 then you know what to expect, but it's a little harder. Whereas in PGR2 once you'd left the starting line you could treat the triggers as digital, slamming on the accelerator whilst coming round a corner and get away with it, PGR3 is far less forgiving. If you do that here, you'll have the same effect as if you were to hold the trigger down at the start of

the race, you'd hear a lot of wheelspin and be very slow to get off the line. To play PGR3 well means treating sensitive control, accelerating gradually out of corners, and knowing when you can't get away with going full throttle all the way around the track.

hells of the American Muscle class, the game could be so much better with a few more options, which is very much apparent when playing online, where every car is just so fast that there are way too many people smashing into walls at every available opportunity.



Anybody who doesn't play PGR3 on the in-car view is missing out the best part of the experience...

You shouldn't take that to mean it's a realistic simulation, though. Kudos are back, and to win kudos, you need to treat your car mean. Slowing down on the racing line and flying out of the other corner might be the best way to shave seconds off your lap time, but if you want to hear the clicking of your meter filling up, you need to make sure that your car is doing things in style. That means sliding around corners sideways, getting your entire car airborne and spinning it around on the spot, all whilst staying ahead of the pack. It's not real, but for all the perfectly accurate wing mirrors and hub caps, it's not trying to be. In the world of Gotham, style comes before speed, despite the fact that even the slowest of the cars in the game can still hit 170mph if given the right treatment, and that's what separates it from the Gran Turismos of the gaming world.

You get around 70 cars in the game, ranked in one of five classes, A-E, with the A class housing beasts like the Ferrari F50-GT and the McLaren F1 LM, and the E class taking up the comparatively slow cars like the Bentley Continental GT and the Aston Martin DB9. Gone are the Minis and Clios, which in many ways is a bad thing. There's nowhere near the variety there was in PGR2, and although it's great you're no longer forced to play through the

It also sounds pretty fine too. Turned up loud on a decent Dolby Digital surround system, you can expect to hear deafening authentic engine noises flying around your head, particularly impressive on in-car view, which gives a completely different audio experience, with every slight movement of the car ringing in your ears, and tyres screeching very convincingly. The game's soundtrack is a bit on the average side though. There's a nice wide range of tracks spread across genres from rock and indie through to techno and even classical, but a lot of it is bland and predictable stuff, with the first movement of Mozart's 40th symphony being the pick of the bunch by a long shot. But it's not really relevant, as by ripping your own CDs, plugging in a portable media device or streaming music from your computer, you can quickly replace the tunes here with your own selection.

The best new addition to PGR3 is the in-car view. Bizarre have created the most immersive cockpit view ever seen, showing off all the dials, the dirt on the windscreen that glints in the light, the wheel being turned by the driver and the whole thing shaking around as you gain speed. Also new is the route creator, allowing you to plan a route between set points in a city, and the rather wonderful photo mode, which lets you to pause the game at any



Photo mode may have been GT4's idea, but PGR3 reaches a new level with freedom of movement

time, enter photo mode and have complete freedom of movement around the track, positioning the camera anywhere you like and applying a number of effects. Unfortunately, GT4's facility to export these images to a memory stick isn't replicated here, you can only view your masterpieces from within PGR3.



Scenery so real you can't quite believe it isn't...

The online modes have taken a complete overhaul. The kind of quick and easy racing that made up the Live component in PGR2 is now in a new area called Playtime, and a new Online Career mode has been added, which basically allows you to race against others in preset conditions, with a wide range of races with fixed tracks and car classes available to ensure everyone is on level ground. It is these matches that are ranked, and you are encouraged to spread your play over them rather than focus your attention on one race, so you play with a spread of cars that perform at different levels. Also new is the Gotham TV mode. A nice idea in practice, it allows you to watch races happening around the

globe, included races your friends are taking part in, as well as watching the best in the world battle it out. Ultimately, however, the novelty wears off fairly quickly.

The single-player mode is the usual affair, and, like it or not, the cone challenges are back, along with one-on-one and street races and timed events. But a couple of new modes join us this time around, eliminator, where the last car at the end of each lap is knocked out, and the great new kudos challenge mode, where you race against a timer which doesn't physically allow enough time to complete a lap, but any time you're racking up kudos the timer stands still, meaning if you're skilled enough, you can get around a lap with only a few seconds on the clock, but crashing will cause failure by the first corner.

PGR3 is a technical marvel, and anyone wanting to show off their latest toy or just loves racing needs this game. It's beautiful to look at, great to play, and exhilarating to listen to, but sadly, it's all over too soon, with a single-player game that ends in under 6 hours and a small variety of cars, but if the online mode manages to keep people coming over the next year, it's essential.

Bizarre have taken a great game and improved everything about it, except for the content. Too few cars and not enough variety in both the vehicles and the cities stop PGR3 becoming a truly legendary title. But if you want a racing experience like no other, then PGR3 has no equal.

5

ugvm
Gold Award
issue 08

Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney

Tim Miller becomes defendant for a week in Capcom's new law-em-up...

Halfway through the first case of Phoenix Wright Ace Attorney, you're likely to start wondering why you're bothering. It's blatantly obvious who the murderer was; you want to be able to show the judge the two bits of evidence which completely prove it, and yet you can't do that - instead, you have to sit through testimony after testimony trying to work out where you can object and reveal the evidence. It's too constraining, and is dangerously dull.

But part way through the second case, which opens with a rather surprising storyline, you realise that you've become gripped. You guide Phoenix around the murder site, around the hotel opposite, meeting a handful of characters who you ask about what they saw on the night of the murder. You collect evidence. You go to court, and listen to witness testimonies, and try and find a contradiction in them - pressing the witnesses to see if they make



The judge is a fool, but it's hard not to love him

Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom
Format: DS
Released: 11/10/2005
Region: US



a mistake or become flustered. You really do get to act like the lawyers on TV. You get to shout "Objection!" - you actually get to shout it, since the DS's microphone will pick it up - and point at the witnesses as you prove to them that they've lied.



You can expect to see plenty of Butz jokes...

Finding out where they've lied is rather tricky at times. Occasionally the contradiction in a testimony is rather well hidden, and you'll struggle to progress. For such an intellectual game, it is rather linear, with you needing to present the right piece of evidence at the right time. In effect, it's just another interface for a standard point-and-click adventure, but that's well disguised and most of the time you really do feel that it's you that's leading the court case along, and not the game.

Indeed, at heart Phoenix Wright is just a text adventure. But it's one that'll make you think like no other - until the sequel arrives.

4

ugvm
Silver Award
41

TimeSplitters 2

Michael Cargill wishes his disc was split...

Unlocking the invincibility cheat in Goldeneye probably ranks as one of my greatest achievements in my time of playing computer games. Completing The Facility level in 2 minutes and 5 seconds was seemingly impossible – Dr Doak just wouldn't stay in the same place each time you played the game. He was the bane of my life for quite a while, not least because there never was a Dr Doak in the Goldeneye film – he was an extra character put in the game by Rare, and he got his name and face from one of the game designers.

A few years on, Mr Doak has blighted my life once more. He is nowhere to be seen in this game, but he is on the development team at Free Radical – the developers who created this game.

So why's my life been lighted? I was a self-certified Goldeneye and Perfect Dark fanboy, and I played both games for months. I still like to fire up Perfect Dark for some deathmatch action every now and then. But I am sad to say that Timesplitters 2 is a huge letdown, and it makes me want to cry.

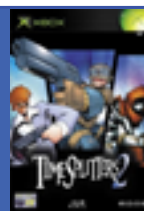


Playing pool is a capital offence in TimeSplitters 2

The plot for TS2 seems to be part of the reason for its failure. It continues on from the first one, with the Timesplitters team jumping through time to stop aliens from taking over at various points in human history. This leads to you playing a different character in each level, and the difference between each level is like Cannon and Ball – there's no sense of continuity whatsoever. It's like a bunch of levels were created by separate teams in separate rooms, and then thrown together into a game.

TS2 is First Person Shooter, which means you are supposed to be controlling someone from a first-person perspective. In this game, however, you seemingly control a floating gun. Most FPS games

Developer: Free Radical
Publisher: EA
Format: Xbox/PS2/GC
Released: 18/10/2002
Region: PAL



Well the graphics are pretty, at least...

have a couple of ways of depicting how a weapon is wielded – sometimes they show your hand holding the gun in front of you (like the pistol in Goldeneye), and sometimes they make out that the weapon is very large and held closer to your body with your hand out of sight (the rocket launcher in Unreal Tournament, for example).

In TS2, you can see whole gun just floating in front of you – it's just completely bizarre, and something that put me off the moment the first level started.

Of the twelve or so single player levels, about four of them in total are good to play. The first level is set on a dam and the music is very Goldeneye-esque, which gave me flashbacks of the wondrous times I had on the N64. There is a Wild West level, with a couple of imaginative parts to it and is quite a joy to play. On the Tokyo level, the music is excellent and the first part of it requires some stealth to sneak into a gang's hideout. Lastly, a level that has you defusing a load of bombs can get rather frantic at times. Sadly, that's it – the rest of the levels are just dull, boring and as inspirational as a holiday programme set in a toilet roll factory.

Usually in these games when you find a new weapon you can't wait to try it out. Sadly, the weapons in TS2 are just plain rubbish. This fact was really hammered home when I got hold of the shotgun – a gun that is the pride and joy in most games, a gun that is supposed to be a morale booster, a gun that just feels manly. When I fired the shotgun for the first time in this game, I thought that my controller wasn't working. It was just pathetic, and reloading it sounded like a box of matches being rattled. In fact, generally there just isn't any real



I think I've jumped off that dam before... Nothing like re-using scenery to reduce the workload

impact to the weapons, and if you are lumbered with the pistol you may as well forget it – it takes ages to fire between shots and so killing anyone with it takes a buttock-clenchingly long time.

Many people say that it is the arcade and multiplayer mode that is the core of TS2. Arcade mode is a series of mini-games with various objectives. Some require you to kill a certain amount of zombies, some require you to avoid touching certain enemies, and one has you trying to smash all the windows in a cathedral using a mortar – as it happens, these are all a bit pants as well, other than the assault levels.



Two guns and no ammo. How useful.

It's a shame that there are only three of those.

Multiplayer is pretty average, with the typical options to set, along with various game modes like deathmatch and capture the flag, and you can even have CPU controlled bots upping the player count. The AI of these bots is a bit rubbish though, and it's not a patch on Perfect Dark's multiplayer greatness. And again, the crapness of the weapons spoils it. No doubt that some people will have fun with the level editor for multiplayer games, and it also supports System Link.

Graphically, it isn't anything amazing either. Whilst the graphical style is good, the game's PS2 origins are plain to see. A couple of plus points are the smooth framerate, and some of the animation. The sound is a mixed bag with much of the music being superb, but most of the sound effects let it down with explosions and gun fire sounding very muted.

All in all, I am sad to give this game the thumbs down. It was actually a game that Goldeneye fans had been looking forward to. It's clearly a game that they have put a lot of time and effort into, with there being plenty of things to do and unlock – it's just a shame that it turned out so poorly in the end.

1

Tokyo Bus Guide

Nathan won't have no Burberry caps on his bus...

It's a tough job but someone's got to do it. People need to get to where they are going, and so someone needs to go to that location, but first pick the people up from where they are already. But lots of different people, who are in different locations. That's the concept of Tokyo Bus Guide.

Kudos to Fortyfive for daring to make such a game. Given the premise, it's quite easy to assume that the game will be boring. However, like Harvest Moon, what is a chore in real life becomes fun in a videogame.

Your objective is simple. Drive a set course, sometimes stopping at bus-stops when people need to get on or off. However you must drive carefully: merely brushing the curb can mean game over. You must remember to indicate before turning. You cannot accelerate or brake too fast (in case Oba-chan Hiroko, the Japanese pensioner, drops her shopping). You're even penalised for driving away from bus-stops without closing your doors first, or for forgetting to announce your next destination.



We think this is a map, with a boot at the bottom

When you start a course, you have 100 points, displayed by a power bar (similar to a Street Fighter energy bar). Mistakes cost you points, the amount depending on the mistake; lose all 100 points and it's game over. Simply accelerating a bit too fast is only worth about 5 points. It's clearly a bigger crime driving away with the doors open (as Oba-chan Hiroko might fall out). Severe crimes like running red lights cost a lot of points and, depending on your energy bar, often the game. Hitting a pedestrian almost certainly means game over. Passing a bus stop will earn back points, and the game is relatively generous with these –

Developer: Fortyfive
Publisher: Fortyfive
Format: Dreamcast
Released: 30/11/1999
Region: Japan



Sadly you can't crush the little cars in your way

a big mistake early on will become insignificant after passing a few bus-stops. Still, it can be hard lasting the whole route without a fatal mistake; the game presents a reasonable challenge but a good difficulty curve.

Navigating tight corners with your long rectangle of a vehicle requires skill and precision, but this is only half the game. The other half is about observation, watching for other drivers and so on. This is much more fun than it sounds – but it's hard to explain what is fun about being quite so anal with your driving. There's quite a sense of personal achievement in successfully navigating routes – the game will appeal to perfectionists.

The graphics are uninspiring and flat, similar to what architects' CAD software probably looks like. To be honest, it would be nice to have Project Gotham Racing 2's attention to detail in recreating the streets of Tokyo. When you get stuck on a long stretch with no turns for a good few minutes, some nice scenery and a feeling of actually being in Tokyo would make these long stretches more interesting. As it is, you don't get much of a sense of place. It's not a huge complaint however, the game does run at a smooth framerate without glitching; it does its job and doesn't affect gameplay directly.

For driving viewpoints, you have two Driver's Seat views, a first person (bus) view, behind the bus, and a bird's eye view. Whichever you go with, frustratingly you end up trading one advantage for another. Behind the bus, you can't see directly in front, obscuring cars stopping there. In the driver's seat, you can't see to the immediate left or right, which means it is hard to judge how close

to the curb you are. Bird's eye view means you can't see very far away from the bus; fo example, once I couldn't see someone turning ahead of me and I crashed into them. Oba-chan Hiroko was not impressed. You'll find yourself constantly switching to fit the situation, so a few 'mirrors' in the cockpit view would have been useful. You get temporary wingmirrors when indicating to change lanes, but that's it, and not, unfortunately when turning a corner.

Despite being a Japanese game, menus are mostly in English and a FAQ is available to get through the basics of the game. Sometimes however, when you make a mistake, you aren't always sure why you were penalised unless you can read the kanji telling you off. It's not a big problem though, and certainly an import-friendly game to English speakers.

Wip3out

Michael Cargill is no longer a firestarter

Wipeout 64, Wipeout 2097 (on PC), Wipeout 3, Wipeout Fusion, Wipeout 2097 (on PlayStation), Wipeout 3 SE. That's the rather obscure order in which I bought and played the seminal Wipeout series.

Sure, I had a few plays in the shops and round my friend's house before Wipeout 64 came along, but that isn't the same as owning and obsessing for yourself. I think the defining moment when I fully realised how 'important' the Wipeout series was one day when I was browsing in my local branch of Electronics Boutique. They had a really good tune playing, and I asked which CD it is was from – the answer, of course, was the Wipeout 2097 soundtrack.



The stupid name can't detract from the quality

Tokyo Bus Guide won't be to everyone's tastes. When turning corners and navigating traffic, you are on your toes, however some sections involve one long straight after another which can become a test of enduring monotony. While this is actually relaxing to some, that may translate as 'boring' to others. It's a lovely change of pace from more manic games though and it's one to keep playing in short but repeated bursts.

The game could have been much more. Adding a greater number of varied routes, different locations around the world and a feeling of being immersed in busy towns would have all gone to make Tokyo Bus Guide more of a classic, rather than simply an interesting and (still) unique idea. Despite this, it's certainly worth trying if you fancy a change from your other list of games.

3

Developer: Psygnosis
Publisher: Psygnosis
Format: PlayStation
Released: 08/09/1999
Region: PAL

Perhaps the biggest change from previous Wipeout games is the addition of analogue control. Do not underestimate this feature – the extra feeling of control you have over your craft is something to behold when compared to the previous digital, D-pad piloted games. For those that hate change, the option to use the D-pad it still there, though you will miss out on the extra depth of the handling. As you swoop down the curves of the tracks, you wonder how you ever managed without the extra comfort of analogue control – the slightest movement of your ship is now possible as you hurtle through the chicanes at breakneck speed, the feeling of being in control of a hovering craft enhanced a hundred-fold. Quite frankly, the 'floaty' handling is almost orgasmic this time around

The Designers Republic return for Wipeout 3. Their unique design style is literally splattered all over the game box, the instruction book and indeed within the game itself – and when it looks this nice, that is no bad thing at all. The main title screen and options screens are very minimalist, though things certainly change when you get into the game itself. Using the Playstation's high resolution mode and running as smooth as silk, this is Sony's console showing just what it is capable of when the correct buttons are pushed – the fruits of the infamous Performance Analyzer bearing itself yet again.

Though the game looks somewhat dated now, you can see how it would have impressed back when

it was released. Flocks of birds flee from your oncoming craft, and monorail trains pass overhead as you race through the circuits. Smoke pours from homing missiles fired at opponents, and the laser-based powerups glow in an alien and angry way as they are activated and fired.

Wipeout has always been well known for its audio, and it is in this game with which the series hits its aural peak. The likes of Sasha, Paul van Dyk, Chemical Brothers and Underworld all bless the game with some top tunes that make many other titles sound like Spectrum demos.

The gentle hum of your craft as you power your way around the circuits is spot on, with it being at precisely the correct volume – loud enough to remind you that this is no rocket-fuelled jet engine, yet quiet enough so as not to intrude. Explosions and other spot effects are well realised, whilst the choice of a female voice for the speech is a nice change. Along with with the superb soundtrack, this creates a far superior atmosphere over what the two prequels managed.

The greatness of the game remains understated, however. A couple of extra modes are here, with

Ridge Racer

Zomoniac's engine sounds like it's ready to go, is he all set?

Ridge Racer is now ten years old. I threw it in my PlayStation to see how well it held up against the new generation of racers.



It's only possible to win in the green and red car

It's ugly. Very ugly. Not really surprising, for a PS launch title. Pop-up everywhere, low frame-rate, but, it does the job. Pixellated and blocky everywhere, but you can make out where the track

Challenge being the biggest. There are three separate challenge modes – Race, Time and Weapon, and all three award medals depending on your performance against increasingly tough targets. The other, less significant mode is Eliminator, which sees you having to destroy your opponents – though along with the Weapon challenge, it seems at odds with the pure racing experience on offer in the rest of the game.

More modes, more power ups, better tunes, better atmosphere, better graphics, infinitely superior controls, bigger better faster and generally more. This game is a benchmark in many ways, and has yet to be beaten – indeed, due to poor sequels sales of this type of game are diminishing. In this modern age of commercialism, it is possible that we may not see another futuristic racer such as this – let alone one that surpasses it. Star Trek was the future for the 1960s; Wipeout 3 is the future for the present day.

5

ugvm Gold Award

Developer:	Namco	
Publisher:	Namco	
Format:	PlayStation	
Released:	09/2005	
Region:	PAL	

is, so that's all that matters. The effects are a nice touch as well, planes flying above your head, big neon signs with games of Galaga dotted about the place. Once you get used to the blocky-ness, it's actually quite pleasant to look at. Maybe.

The best loading screen ever, hands down. 15 seconds to beat a round of Galaga. Do it, and the number of cars you start the game with goes from four to twelve. Brilliant. There are thirteen cars in total, the last being the supremely fast Diablo, unlocked by beating it, which will destroy any other car on the track. The only downside with the presentation is the lack of auto-load. You'll need to go through the options menu each time to get your save running.

Sound-wise, perfectly fitting soundtrack, retro-techno! Crap, but great at the same time. And the announcer guy! I love that guy. Very entertaining he is, "WHOOO! That was a great counter! You must be one genius of a driver, you gotta teach meeee!" Well, I like him anyway.

Gameplay is perfect. Completely unrealistic handling, possible to floor it through most of the

track without even thinking about braking (unless you choose one of the ludicrous sports cars that spin out all over the place), and insane powersliding round those corners that do occasionally require less than full acceleration.

So it only has one track. A lot of people weren't too impressed. There are four races. Easy and Medium race the basic track. Hard and TT race the track with a big extension, effectively doubling the length of it. Beat all these, and you have to do them all again backwards. Eight races in all. The clock is often a bitch to beat, particularly on the backwards

Sonic Battle

deKay doesn't kick hedgehogs – that often

Everyone loves Sonic the Hedgehog, don't they? With his super-fast running, and twisty loop-the-looping, ring collecting and all that. Even those strange few people who don't like him, can surely at least appreciate why others do. Now Sega, over the last few years, has tried new things with the Sonic series. 3D, team play, pinball, and so on. Some worked well, others less so. What is clear, is that fans want "traditional" Sonic games – 2D and fast. So Sega release Sonic Battle.



Let us just explain something here. In the dank and distant past (well, the mid-90s anyway), Sega created a game called Sonic the Fighters. It was a bit like Virtua Fighter, only with Sonic characters, and was actually pretty good. Even though it was built on Sega's STV hardware (basically, a Saturn in an arcade cab), it was only recently released for home consoles as part of the Sonic Gems collection. Sonic Battle is not this game.

Which is a shame, since Sonic the Fighters was

Hard and TT races, so they'll often require multiple attempts, but the game can be beaten from start to finish by a seasoned player in less than 45 minutes. But it's addictive, I frequently play it just to try trim seconds off my lap times in the Diablo for no real benefit. So in that sense, it'll last me forever.

It's about £3 in most shops now, so if you don't have it, there's no reason not to. The best arcade racing series of all time, and this, arguably the best of the lot.

5

ugvm Gold Award

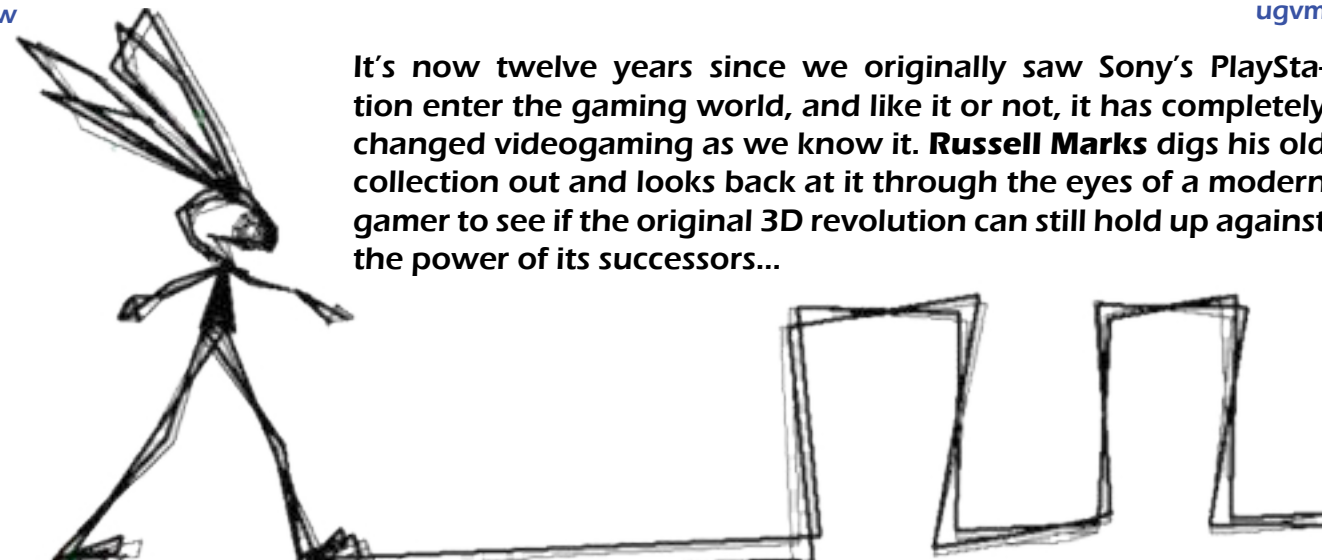
Developer:	Dimps	
Publisher:	THQ	
Format:	GBA	
Released:	27/02/2004	
Region:	PAL	

good. Sonic Battle is the worst Sega game I have played since Last Battle. Despite the similarity in name, Sonic Battle only resembles Last Battle in crapness, something it has in spades. There are three basic modes – one player, two player, and story. All revolve around fighting in some really poor sort-of 3D arenas – sort of like the old King Of Monsters NeoGeo games, but with a bit of playfield rotation. Actual fighting is just stupid, as you can only attack left or right, despite there being depth to the playfield, so if you're not in the same plane, hits won't connect. Your moves are uninspired, and although staying true to the Sonic Universe to some degree (Sonic spin-attacks, Knuckles glides, etc) they don't translate well to a one-on-one fighter.

That's not actually true. Well, the one-on-one bit anyway, as up to four fighters can square off. Not that it makes it any more exciting – it's certainly no Power Stone or Super Smash Bros (although you'll wish it was). Story Mode adds a contrived plot to the proceedings, with Sonic finding one of Eggman's robots washed up on the beach, and with Tails sets about 'training' it up. All interspersed with fights in the same way porn film storylines are interspersed with sex. There is a weakly tacked on card collecting sub-feature in Story Mode, but you won't gain a lot from bothering with it. Rather like the game itself.

Unless Sega (and Sonic Team specifically) can come up with what the Sonic fans actually want, and stop churning out this type of dross, they should just bury Sonic and be done with it. Sonic Battle is a complete embarrassment for both the company and the character ... and you, should you buy it.

1



It's now twelve years since we originally saw Sony's PlayStation enter the gaming world, and like it or not, it has completely changed videogaming as we know it. **Russell Marks** digs his old collection out and looks back at it through the eyes of a modern gamer to see if the original 3D revolution can still hold up against the power of its successors...

Ape Escape

SCEE

Platformer with monkey-catching. *Previously:* Played it through twice, getting a 100% finish the first time. *Notes:* Boy is this one familiar. This time I go through three levels at the start, and it's still quite fun to play. Much too easy, but the first levels always are. It doesn't quite have the flair of a Mario or Sonic, but it's probably the closest I've seen anyone else come to that. Good stuff.

Quick Rating: 4/5 **Time Played:** 9 minutes



Bloody Roar

Virgin

One-on-one fighter with "beast mode" gimmick. *Previously:* Played it a ridiculous amount years ago, hooked on the speed and smashing of opponents through the cage. *Notes:* Ouch, crappy FMV alert. Right, looks like I can remember some of Bakuryu's moves at least. Hmm. It's ok, and there isn't all that much wrong with it, but it's so very generic. And apart from the cage-smashing antics it's really a bit tedious.

Quick Rating: 3/5 **Time Played:** 15 minutes



Bloody Roar 2

Virgin

Bloody Roar sequel, though in truth it's more of a remake. *Previously:* Briefly went through the Arcade and Story modes with Bakuryu, found it all rather disappointing. It seemed to be lacking some of the fluidity the original had, probably in an attempt to balance the gameplay a bit. *Notes:* A bit lazy of me, but again I play as Bakuryu. Hmm. In some ways it's better, the hires graphics most obviously, arguably improved character designs, and the addition of a Story mode (half-hearted as it is). But the backgrounds are almost non-existent, and the music which was already questionable at times in the prequel can get pretty bad here (the you-win music is enough to make you wish you'd lost). Gameplay is ok I suppose, I've played worse, but unless you're in beast mode it doesn't really have the speed of the original. And the Arcade mode completely lacks the real final boss unless you beat everyone else with no continues, which - while I'm sure it's meant to encourage you to do better - is quite frustrating.

Quick Rating: 3/5 **Time Played:** 20 minutes



Colin McRae Rally

Codemasters

Reasonably realistic rally game. *Previously:* I never managed the Expert mode but still play the odd rally on Intermediate every so often. That said, I haven't touched it for about a month. *Notes:* I play a single rally, Australia. Fantastic stuff. Everything about the game just feels right, I don't think any other rally game I've seen has such a good mix of realistic and arcadey handling. The graphics are quite good for the PS too.

Quick Rating: 5/5 **Time Played:** 22 minutes



Colin McRae Rally 2

Codemasters

Rallying again, this time with (apparently) a bit more realism. *Previously:* For me this was a big disappointment after the original. I never got used to the handling, and after a while it just got much too difficult. *Notes:* I don't have a save for this, so it's Finland or nothing. The handling is ludicrous, it's like the car is on ice the whole time. But as I play a few stages now, while I don't actually like the handling, somehow it's not bad to play. If I hadn't just played the prequel I might even rate it a bit more highly, but as it is...

Quick Rating: 3/5 **Time Played:** 12 minutes



Crash Bandicoot 3: Warped

SCEE

The last Crash Bandicoot platform game on the PS, with strange gameplay which (mostly) isn't 2D, but isn't really 3D either. *Previously:* For years I'd been reluctant to get a Crash game and I knew why as I soon as I got this. Bland and often annoying, with weak level design. I beat the not-really-final boss for the hell of it and did a few time trials, but little more than that. *Notes:* I try for one of the gems (clear all blocks in a level), and a time-trial relic - these are required to get more than the (wildly misrepresented) "30%" finish. Clearing all the blocks in a level is boring at best, and the game tends to make it hard or impossible to backtrack and pick up any you missed. The time trials are very frustrating because, as with the game in general, one hit kills. In the time trials there aren't even any checkpoints, die in these and you have to start the level from scratch. Maybe this isn't so unreasonable, but I think the basic game has to be a lot better than it is here before it can be remotely worth dealing with that kind of crap.

Quick Rating: 2/5 **Time Played:** 12 minutes



Grand Theft Auto

BMG

Mostly-driving-based gangster sim with top-down view. Has one or two sequels you might possibly be familiar with. *Previously:* Years ago it was quite good, though I think I got stuck on the last level. I've not played it for years. *Notes:* Whoa... PS games aren't exactly famous for high framerates but this is quite severely jerky. And the way the camera zooms in and out depending on speed is terrible. The game itself is reasonable enough, and being able to steal any car you like the look of is a nice touch. The music is really good too. But it's just so hard to play without getting a headache.

Quick Rating: 2/5 **Time Played:** 15 minutes

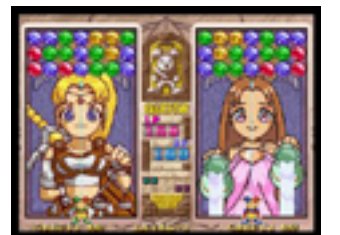


Magical Drop 3

Data East

Frantic puzzle game ported from the Neo Geo. *Previously:* I played the original a fair bit under emulation, which is really why I got this, but I haven't played this version as much. *Notes:* I try it on Normal, which is probably a mistake as it's too easy and only properly gets going on the last couple of "fights". Even so, it's a solid port with all the gameplay, character animations, and even the Japanese voices intact. Sorely tempted to try Hard difficulty, but I know that takes quite a while to play and I'd better get on to the next game...

Quick Rating: 4/5 **Time Played:** 15 minutes



Medal Of Honor

EA

WW2-themed FPS. Another one with obscure, little-known sequels. *Previously:* Went through it once, found it ok but a bit annoying at times. Hardly touched since. *Notes:* I vaguely remember this having a slow start, so I have a go at the one of the levels in the second mission. I'd forgotten how utterly nerve-racking the game is - I don't know if it's the dark environment, or the WW2 theme, or maybe it's just that I don't play first-person shooters very often (I'm generally not keen on them). Whatever it is, this is better than I'd expected, and the setting really seems to add to it. Not sure my nerves could take playing it for much longer than this though.

Quick Rating: 4/5 **Time Played:** 12 minutes



Medal Of Honor Underground

EA

MoH's immediate sequel, another FPS. (I got it along with MoH in the twin-pack rerelease.) *Previously:* Didn't quite finish this, it got severely annoying towards the end. *Notes:* Uh-oh, here we go again. And here too, just playing one of the earlier levels it's rather good. Perhaps too similar to the first game, there's little difference apart from the levels. It's hard to forget what a total pain it was near the end of the game when I played it before, but from just this go I have to say it's, um... good. Yes.

Quick Rating: 4/5 **Time Played:** 11 minutes



Pandemonium

BMG

2D-in-3D platform game. *Previously:* I think I played the hell out of this one - but that was about five years ago. *Notes:* Well, I can see why I played this so much. Given that this is basically Generic Platformer #243 it's stunning. Surprisingly nice graphics given its age, decent level designs, and quite addictive to play even though it's obviously all been done before.

Quick Rating: 4/5 **Time Played:** 24 minutes



Resident Evil

Capcom

Survival horror, though given the terrible controls you might be forgiven for thinking of it as Paperboy with zombies. *Previously:* Played for about a week in 1997 (finishing it as Jill) and hardly touched since. I remember there being plenty about the game which annoyed me even then. *Notes:* No save file, so started a new game. The non-FMV cut-scenes are unskippable, which is highly annoying. Loading delays are frequent and lengthy. Many of the fixed camera angles suck. It's all ponderously slow and dull, and I'm not keen on having so little ammo - if you ask me, shooting stuff shouldn't boil down to tedious ammo optimisation, or at least not to this extent. Shotgunning zombie heads is about all this has going for it, and it's just not enough.

Quick Rating: 2/5 **Time Played:** 18 minutes



Ridge Racer Type 4

Namco

Arcadey road-racing sequel. *Previously:* Quickly finished with the normal and hard teams, but not the hardest I think. Didn't play it much after that. *Notes:* I start a go on the main championship-thingy mode. The handling is wildly unrealistic of course, but at least that's intentional. The drifting in particular feels very artificial, but I get the idea before long. After a slightly dodgy start, I win a few races. Decent graphics for the PS, and good music too. It's really quite a good game... in a shallow, short-term sort of way. But if 20 minutes isn't short-term I don't know what is.

Quick Rating: 4/5 **Time Played:** 23 minutes



Rollcage

SCEE

Wipeout on wheels, pretty much. *Previously:* I quite enjoyed this one at the time, despite the rampant clichés (desert track, ice track, city-at-night track, etc.). Haven't played it much for a few years. *Notes:* I try it on Hard difficulty, since that's really the intermediate level. Looks good, sounds good, lots going on, gets a bit overwhelming at times. Driving on the sides/roof of tunnels and having buildings to blow up are neat gimmicks, and work well. But the car's almost uncontrollable. I struggle to finish last. Try the other sets of races, but never manage more than second. Absolutely bizarre. I know the game is better than this, but right now I'm so terrible at it that I'm not sure it's actually fun to play.

Quick Rating: 3/5 **Time Played:** 35 minutes



Rollcage Stage 2

SCEE

Rollcage sequel. *Previously:* Initially it seemed ok but in the end I was disappointed with this, especially the last track which is far too hard (and virtually impossible if you're not using analogue steering). Not played much as a result. *Notes:* Again I play the intermediate difficulty, and the cars are a lot more stable this time around. The music is a bit worse though; and the severe motion blur used when it's raining is very annoying. There also seems to be something indefinable missing from the sequel - not that any of that matters, because the F-Zero-style progressive automatic knockout on (only) the last race of a set almost totally ruins the game. This may have worked in F-Zero, but here it's a colossal mistake. It's deeply irritating and arbitrary, and makes losing randomly on the last race far too easy.

Quick Rating: 2/5 **Time Played:** 13 minutes



Soul Blade

Namco

One-on-one fighter with weapons and a simple quest mode of sorts. *Previously:* Finished it all off fairly quickly, and played a bit more after that, but not much. *Notes:* The Edge Master mode would take too long, so I try the Arcade mode as Hwang. Quite good - the graphics are very simplistic compared to the Soul Calibur games, but the music and even the gameplay seem better to me (despite it having fewer moves). And it's so much more interesting than Bloody Roar was.

Quick Rating: 4/5 **Time Played:** 17 minutes



Spiderman

Activision

A sort of action-adventurey scrolling beat-em-up in 3D, or, well, something like that. *Previously:* Briefly thought it was ok, then it got very annoying indeed. I ended up cheating through the last few levels, and never touched it again. *Notes:* I deliberately avoid the more annoying levels of the game, play a couple which are rather dull, and still quickly end up in a highly irritating chase scene. What's the point? Frankly I'm surprised I ever bothered even cheating through the game.

Quick Rating: 1/5 **Time Played:** 12 minutes



Spyro: Year Of The Dragon

SCEE

Third in the Spyro series of platform games. *Previously:* Didn't fully finish it, but did beat the not-really-final boss and got 140-odd eggs. Found the platforming mostly too easy, the minigames mostly too hard and the bosses incredibly irritating. The game has a weird auto-difficulty scheme which seems to let you manage the minigames/bosses eventually, so the seriously misjudged difficulty wasn't disastrously bad, but I still found it frustrating. *Notes:* I give the minigames a wide berth. I pick a level I'm missing gems from, and play to collect those. (Not as stupid as it sounds, as you're required to collect every last one to unlock bonus levels and finish the game properly.) It plays ok despite the control being a bit loose and the camera less than ideal, and it has impressive graphics for a PS game. The game gives you a gem-locating powerup of sorts late on, so I use that. Most of the gems seem to be from flying enemies I hadn't hit before. Then I find a locked box containing gems, a rather unsubtle hint that I have to find a key somewhere on the level. This is about the point at which I realise that I'm not too big a fan of tedious item hunts, however nice they might look.

Quick Rating: 3/5 **Time Played:** 24 minutes



Super Puzzle Fighter 2 Turbo

Capcom

Action puzzle game with shades of Puyo Puyo, and with animations of super-deformed Capcom characters. *Previously:* I liked the presentation and style of it, but never really thought that much of the game. *Notes:* I play arcade mode using a character with a pretty good attack pattern, Donovan. Even then I find myself almost randomly needing continues. I wouldn't mind but it's not like I haven't played a puzzle game or two. Apart from that, and the nice presentation, it all seems rather drab and lifeless somehow. I think it must just be me, and as ever I can't help thinking it's the kind of game I "should" like (which is why I can never quite bring myself to sell it), but... nope.

Quick Rating: 2/5 Time Played: 24 minutes



Tekken

Namco

One-on-one fighter which probably sold more than a few Playstations. *Previously:* Played it to death years ago, but hardly touched it after getting the sequel. *Notes:* Nice to have that Galaga bonus stage while loading. Into the game itself - ouch, the graphics are really dated. Quite good music though. I play as Kazuya, and generally mess things up by trying moves that only Heihachi has. But I gradually get into it a bit more, and it's quite fun really. Then I remember how even on Ultra Hard the AI is easily caught out by running towards them with a flying kick as they get up, which ruins it a bit. Oh well.

Quick Rating: 3/5 Time Played: 16 minutes



Tekken 2

Namco

Tekken sequel. *Previously:* I must have played this as much as Tekken, but I've barely played it for years now. *Notes:* This time I take the hint and play Heihachi. I have to say the sequel plays a lot better, and doesn't have such glaring flaws in the AI. At the same time, the music takes a bit of a nosedive, and while the graphics do (shock horror) actually have variable lighting this time, this has downsides in that it really shows up the blockiness of the character models. But it's better overall, and probably the best Tekken game.

Quick Rating: 4/5 Time Played: 12 minutes



Tekken 3

Namco

Yet another Tekken sequel. *Previously:* Finally got this last year, as I'd thought it might be disappointing, and it was. Unlocked everything then left it for dead. *Notes:* Can't seem to find my save, so I play as Jin. Graphics and music are a bit better, even if the background bitmap looks oddly like a curtain in a way it didn't in the previous games. In theory it's just a tweaked Tekken 2 with some rather annoying new characters, but somehow it doesn't feel right, in a way that's hard to pin down.

Quick Rating: 2/5 Time Played: 13 minutes



Tempest X3

Interplay

Retro-ish shoot-em-up, a Tempest 2000 port/update. *Previously:* Another one I played quite a bit years ago, but haven't really tried for ages. I seem to remember I was getting far enough - the high-score table suggests level 70 or so - that it just took forever to play, and somehow I didn't like playing with the "keys" that let you start from a level not far from where you previously got to (it's a bit weird). *Notes:* I start from a few levels in, not using a key but just selecting a slightly later level at the start. Good music. The screen gets a bit too busy to see what's actually going on much of the time, and the game soon degenerates into frantically trying to get the Jump powerup each time, so that when your end of the "web" gets taken over by huge numbers of baddies you have some hope of staying alive. I suppose it's not bad for a quick blast, but it's very repetitive.

Quick Rating: 3/5 Time Played: 23 minutes



TOCA 2 Touring Cars

Codemasters

Fairly serious road-racer. *Previously:* An impulse buy for three quid which I instantly regretted. I played it so little I'm surprised I didn't return it. *Notes:* Wow, I'm impressed - this really is just unplayably awful. The draw distance is such that corners are upon you before you even know they're there, the engine sounds are a highly annoying wobbly sample, and the control is far worse than even CMR2, which is quite ludicrous given that this is meant to be on a surface with good grip. I'm not a fan of this kind of F1-ish racing anyway, I have to admit, but this seems like a particularly bad take on it.

Quick Rating: 1/5 Time Played: 7 minutes



Tomb Raider

Eidos

A 3D rip-off of the original Prince of Persia, you might say. *Previously:* Another impulse buy, two quid in this case. I went through a number of levels before I found I just couldn't be bothered with it any more. *Notes:* No save, unfortunately; I use a level-skip cheat to start a few levels in. Just my luck that I pick a puzzley level I can almost-but-not-quite remember how to do. But my main problem is the temperamental controls and hopeless camera. I struggle my way through fighting those for a while, but it's not long before I simply can't be bothered with it. Deja vu, then.

Quick Rating: 2/5 Time Played: 11 minutes



Tony Hawk's Skateboarding

Activision

Erm. If this weren't a Tony Hawk game I'd call it Tony Hawk-like. Goal-based skateboarding platformer? *Previously:* One of my favourite PS games, I played this one through to 30 tapes and three golds with every skater, then started another save to play it through some more, then bought the Dreamcast version. Bit scary, really. But I've not played either version for a while now. *Notes:* I start a career from scratch. It's quite good but it's all just too familiar to me now. It's also very easy - in the time I played it I completely cleared two levels and won a competition, despite doing fairly badly. Then there's the small matter of the very limited draw distance and framerate, and the way it's missing so many useful moves from the later games. This shouldn't be a big deal, and in some ways it isn't, but it's hard not to miss at least having manuals. Still, my rating here is mostly a reflection of how much I've overplayed the game.

Quick Rating: 3/5 Time Played: 12 minutes



Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4

Activision

Relatively recent Tony Hawk sequel, which somehow got released for the PS. *Previously:* Uh, yeah, I really should get a current console... This is utterly different from the real versions, here it's just using a tweaked THPS2 engine which obviously limits the size of the levels. But it's more difficult than the previous games and very good for what it is - and I enjoyed playing through it, finishing about a week ago. *Notes:* I start a new game. This is more like it, the career mode is much more interesting than in the first game. There are loads of goals, all pretty easy at the start admittedly but lots to do (and I know it gets downright tough later on). Having it as no-time-limit free skate until you choose a goal is a nice change, and having the option to instantly retry a goal is even better. The music is mostly decent enough, and the textures look smoother almost to the point of being cartoony. The draw distance is still pretty bad, the levels are basically static except for the player, and the framerate seems to vary between rather better and rather worse than the earlier games depending on what you can see. There's also a minor bug with the memory card saving, as it seems to unnecessarily require a free memory block before it'll let you update an existing save. So there are ups and downs, but for the PS it's a worthy sequel, and certainly fun to play. Hard to stop playing it, in fact, but I'd better get on to the next game.

Quick Rating: 4/5 Time Played: 44 minutes



V-Rally

Atari

Simplistic rally game with featherweight cars which fly end over end if you so much as skim a blade of grass. *Previously:* Well, this is what they were generally like before CMR... a bit crap. I played this one for a little while at the time, but not since. *Notes:* No save, so I play Arcade on Easy to a finish, and briefly try the start of Medium. The weak "music" quickly gets annoying. Handling is crazy - it almost seems like FWD cars can't slide in any way, while 4WD cars do nothing else. All the cars are so lightweight and floaty that the tiniest little bump will literally send them flying into the air. Controls are very twitchy, not a good thing when you have to play with the d-pad. Three-lap races against other cars seem a bit absurd in a rally game. In the end it's just rather bizarre and no fun at all.

Quick Rating: 1/5 **Time Played:** 22 minutes

Vib-Ribbon

SCEE

Rhythm game stripped to the basics, which lets you play along to your own CDs. *Previously:* It was ok, but I didn't think playing along to CDs really added that much to it. A nice idea though. *Notes:* Hmm, should I play the game's own tracks or play a CD? I think I'll go for the game's own, on the Silver tracks. In a way it's quite good, and I get into it almost immediately, but somehow there isn't really much to keep you playing. Maybe it's a bit too stripped-down for me.

Quick Rating: 3/5 **Time Played:** 7 minutes

WipEout

Psygnosis

Futuristic racer with more than a few features lifted from F-Zero. *Previously:* The game I originally bought a PS for. I remember I only finally beat the thing after six months (!), and not long after that I largely stopped playing. *Notes:* I could play it on Venom class I suppose, but I risk playing on the harder/faster Rapier. Blimey. This is better than I'd expected. It's definitely very annoying that you basically stop dead whenever you hit the sides, and Rapier class is pretty seriously tough (I've no idea how I ever managed to beat it). But it plays really well considering, and has half-decent graphics and great music.

Quick Rating: 4/5 **Time Played:** 29 minutes

WipEout 2097

Psygnosis

Wipeout sequel with more forgiving gameplay. *Previously:* A bit of a change from the prequel, I beat this one in under a week. Played for a few months after that, but only rarely since about 1999. *Notes:* I play the first four stages of the Phantom class "Challenge II". Well, it's Wipeout but more so, and minus the rough edges. It plays better, looks slightly better... not sure about the music being better, but it's still good. Something's slightly off though, I think I've just played this one too much before.

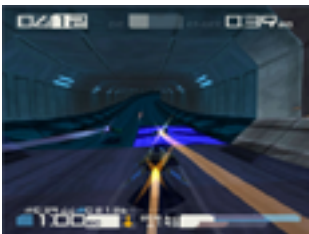
Quick Rating: 4/5 **Time Played:** 24 minutes

Wip3out

Psygnosis

Another Wipeout sequel. *Previously:* I didn't like this one. Maybe it was just too difficult for me or something, but it didn't feel right. I also didn't like the way some of the track layouts seemed to be recycled from the earlier games (and no, I'm not talking about the Special Edition here). Not played it for about a year. *Notes:* This time I try "Challenge 3", which I think is Venom class. Slightly better graphics, rather nondescript music, and a "hyper-thrust" feature lifted directly from F-Zero X which almost single-handedly ruins the game. (Strange, as it was excellent in F-Zero X itself.) I try three or four times to get past even the first race - which, to be fair, seems to be using my absolute least favourite vehicle in the game - and give up in disgust. If anything it's worse than I remembered.

Quick Rating: 2/5 **Time Played:** 11 minutes



Xbox Live Arcade

You know that feeling you get when you buy the most powerful games machine on earth, and all you use it for is playing puzzle games that a PlayStation could do? Zomoniac does...

Hexic HD

Rotate groups of three hexagons to match the colours, and they disappear. Simple. Less so when you factor in stars, bombs, pearls and god knows what else. Three very different modes, and a rather low price tag of free, Hexic is a master of reducing and inducing stress in a five second period.



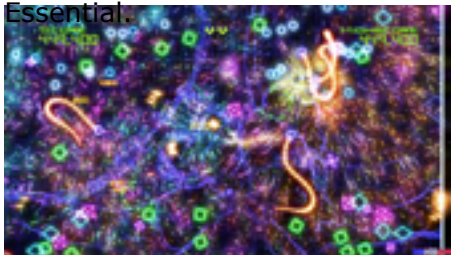
Zuma

Shooting coloured balls at other coloured balls isn't exactly new, but it's way more fun shooting them out of a frog's mouth as the balls fly round you at ridiculous speeds. It's Puzzle Bobble on speed, with more variety, featuring adventure and survival modes, and a one-more-go factor like nothing else.



Geometry Wars Evolved

The mini-game from PGR2 turns up again, this time with a make-over. Same rules apply, left stick moves, right stick shoots, everything must die. A neon lightshow, GWE is the prettiest 2D game ever made, producing completely chaotic moments of visual splendour within seconds. Essential.



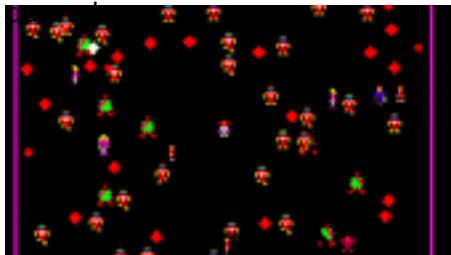
Mutant Storm Reloaded

Very much like GWE, but divided into levels rather than one big score-fest. This makes for a much calmer game, relatively speaking, but it is no worse for it. 89 levels plus other game modes ensure you'll be coming back to MSR for a fair while, with the higher difficulty levels providing a great challenge.



Robotron: 2084

Yet another left-stick-move-and-right-stick-shoot game, the daddy of them all makes an appearance. As fun as it is, the lack of any analogue control whatsoever and the completely original visuals means this one feels as old as it is. Five years ago, maybe, but now GWE and MSR have con-



Smash TV

The fourth and final 2D dual-stick shooter. Ugly and insanely hard but huge amounts of fun if you don't mind abusing the infinite continues it provides you with. It's better than Robotron, just because there's so much more to it, with tons of different bonuses and weapons, but the retro 2D shooter is dead.



Hold the back page

A short while ago I was in GameStation browsing the Dreamcast games, as I tend to do. Many of the games cost between fifty pence and £2.99, a long shot from the £40 they were when I was a lad.

A few evenings later I found myself searching Dreamcast binary groups trying to find the homebrew MP3 player application I had way back when. I was shocked, horrified and slightly perplexed to find there were people downloading these same games I'd seen days earlier for half a pound. Once they'd bought the CD-R, they were saving thirty-five pence for the privilege of not having a manual or box and having to go through the pain of downloading and piecing together the files and burning the disc.

Up until this point I always thought people pirated to save money. A blank DVD is, after all, much cheaper than a new Xbox 360 game. But that got me wondering. Why do people do such pointless pirating? Do they get a feeling of superiority, that they are downloading old and irrelevant software and are therefore more 1337? Do they have some sort of moral objection to retailers? To publishers? Or is it just a strange and sad mindset that people pirate because they know they shouldn't?

Much like the 10-year old smokers and 14-year old binge drinkers hanging around in the park, a lot of piracy seems to stem purely from the fact that people get a kick out of doing something they know is wrong and illegal. It's a disturbing idea. Maybe they just want to prove a point to themselves. A known pirate recently stated: "Go back to your safe little consumer worlds with its little rules that im sure none of you have ever ever broken and leave the technical stuff to us haxperts". It would appear they are trying to avoid the consumer worlds with little rules.

To pay more and waste time to obtain a vastly inferior product seems to appeal to some people, regardless of the damage it causes. Many of us will never understand this behaviour, and simply stand back and watch, very confused. I'd love to see inside the mind of a pirate. Yarr...

Zomoniac

ugvm